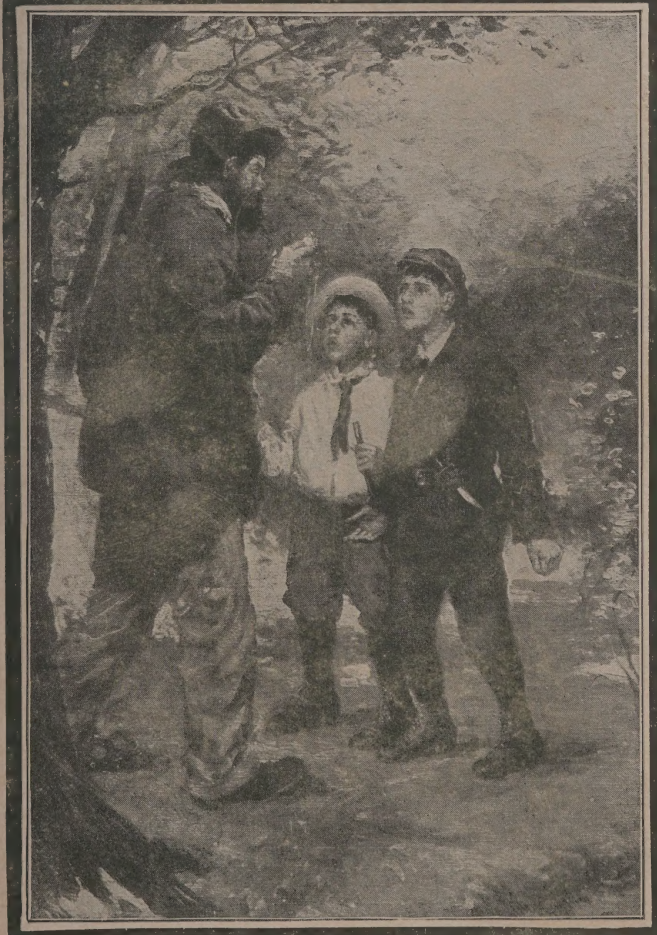
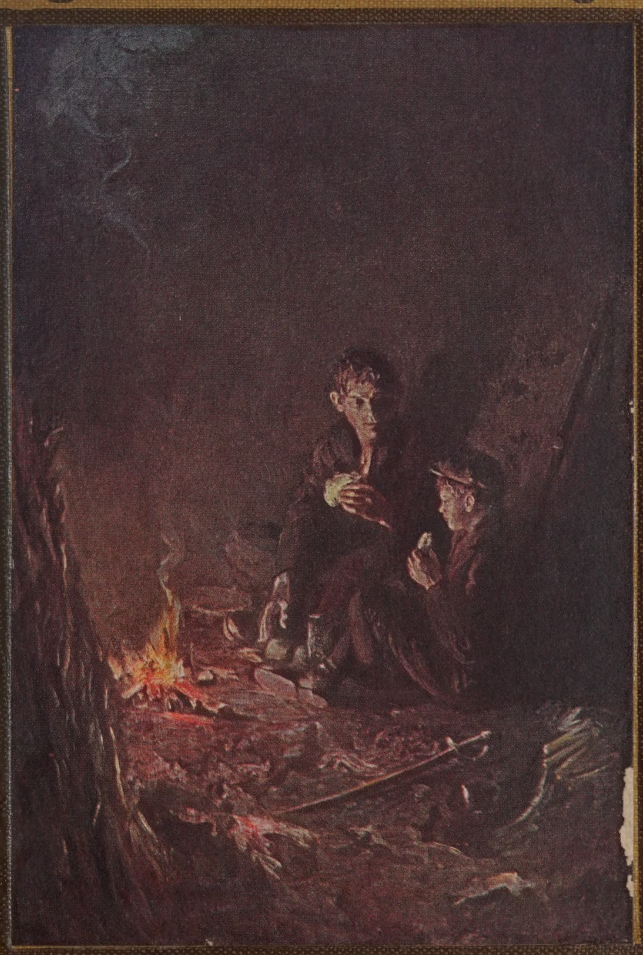


HARRY'S RUNAWAY

Olive Thorne Miller



HARRY'S RUNAWAY

Olive Thorne Miller

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By Olive Thorne Miller

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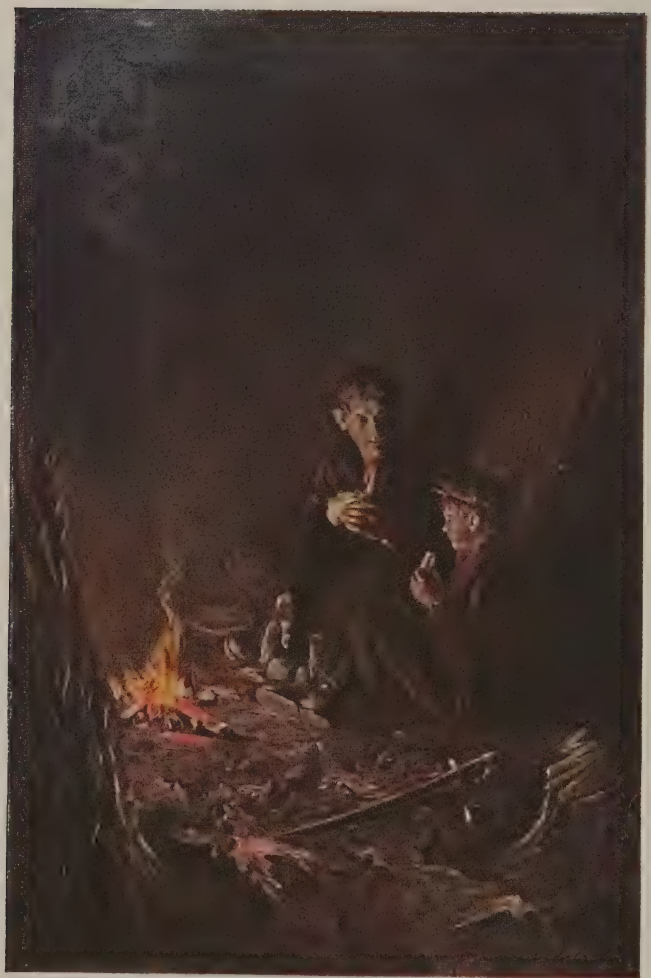
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HARRY'S RUNAWAY AND WHAT CAME OF IT



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BESIDE THE BRIGHTLY BLAZING FIRE

HARRY'S RUNAWAY AND WHAT CAME OF IT

BY

OLIVE THORNE MILLER



BOSTON
AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON
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Published October 1907

PREFACE

Nearly every story in this book is true. Names and places are of course changed, but the principal facts, the adventures and their results to the boys, are strictly true.

Olive Thorne Miller

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for

Young People

of

All Ages



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HARRY'S RUNAWAY

CHAPTER I

HOW HARRY RAN AWAY

"I won't stand it much longer, anyway," said Harry Barnes defiantly, digging the blade of his knife into a piece of wood.

"What 'll you do?" asked his companion, a rather delicate-looking boy, two years younger than he.

"I 'll run away. That 's what," answered Harry quickly. "And I tell you what, Fred, I 've thought of a splendid plan for us — you 'll go, of course?"

"Yes," said Fred gloomily, "I 'll do anything to get rid of being treated like a baby and fed on slops. I think when a boy 's twelve years old he might eat what he 's a mind to."

"So do I," answered Harry; "but that 's nothing to being an errand-boy for a boarding-

house. It 's 'Harry, do this,' and 'Harry, go get that,' from morning to night, and I 'm about sick of it. How do you suppose I like to bring a great dish of butter through the streets, and have Aunt stand in the door and call out, 'Hurry up! the table is waiting!' so everybody can hear? Why, I hardly ever get to school before the bell rings, and I never have time to play ball after school, I have so many errands to do."

"Why don't you tell her you won't do it?" asked Fred. "She is n't your mother."

"I did say something once," said Harry, "and got a precious lecture to pay for it, about being an expense to her, and she obliged to work hard for her living, and so on. It was sickening — I won't say anything — I 'll run away, and mighty soon, too," he added, decidedly.

"Well, what is your plan?" asked Fred. "To go out West and fight Indians?"

"No," said Harry scornfully. "Those stories are ridiculous! How could we get out West, to begin with, and how could we fight if we did?

My plan is better than that. It is this; to go to Brown's Tract, which is only forty miles, you know, so we can easily walk there, and shoot deer and things, and live in a cave or somewhere. I know we can do it," he went on excitedly. "I've heard some gentlemen at our house talk about it — they go every summer — and it's just as easy! I've listened to what they said, and I know what we want, and how to fish, and cook things, and everything!"

"What do we want?" asked Fred, "and how can we get it?"

"Well, we want provisions enough for a few days, till we get where the game is; and we want warm clothes, plenty of matches, and guns, of course. Oh, yes — and fishhooks and lines; poles we can cut anywhere," he went on earnestly. "I tell you, Fred, we can have grand old times there by ourselves, with no one to order us around."

"Nor to make us eat oatmeal and stuff," added Fred. "Well, when shall we go, and how shall we get away?" he went on eagerly.

"We'll go as soon as we can slip out the

things we need; and as for the way — nothing is easier, I 'll tell you."

After a long talk, in which everything was arranged, the boys separated, and both went home with their heads full of plans and excitement. They had agreed to carry a part of their outfit that very evening to a certain place settled upon, so that they should not be too much loaded the next evening, when they intended to go to stay.

Accordingly, that night they met at a certain corner, and made their way quietly towards an old barn on the edge of the city that Fred happened to know was empty at present and not hard to get into. They were both well loaded down, and this is what they had. Harry had brought a gun which had belonged to his uncle and had seen service years ago, but was now out of repair and rusty from long disuse. Harry thought he could clean it up, and to that end had brought some rags, and polish, and oil, — anyway, clean or not clean, they must of course have a gun. To this was added a suit of last win-

ter's clothes, a pair of boots which had been cast off by one of the boarders (and he had long wanted to wear), an old knapsack, a powder-horn, half full, a game-bag, an old silver watch that would n't go, and half a dozen pocket knives.

"I always have dozens of knives," said he, when Fred asked how he got so many. "Every boarder who wants to give me anything always gives a knife. I had five last Christmas," he added grumblingly; "but what have you brought?"

Fred displayed his treasures. An old-fashioned horse-pistol, — "rather large," he said, "but good to shoot;" a box of caps; a sword that his father had worn in the war; an air-pistol that shot slugs; an overcoat of his father's (he could n't find his winter clothes), and a hatchet.

"They 're all first rate," said Harry. "Now to-morrow night we must bring provisions. We must have enough to last two or three days, till we can shoot something, and of course all the money we can get. We won't need

any in the woods, but if we could get a chance to ride part of the way we 'd be sure to get far away before they caught us. Once in the woods, and we can defy them ! "

" I have n't much money," said Fred, — " about fifty cents."

" Well, I have n't any more myself," said Harry bitterly. " I never have any money, unless one of the boarders pays me for doing an errand ; I believe Aunt thinks boys never want money. Never mind," he went on, shaking his fist towards the house, " just wait till I get into the woods and become a hunter ! you may keep your old money then ! " and he snapped his fingers in utter contempt.

The next evening everything seemed to favor the boys, and at nine o'clock, as they had agreed, they met at the old corner, and hurried to the empty barn.

" Did anybody see you ? " whispered Harry anxiously, as they hastily turned into a dark street.

" No ; everybody went to meeting at our house," said Fred, " and I had a splendid

chance to rummage the pantry. What did you get?" he asked eagerly.

"Oh, some pies and things," said Harry, who cared far less for that part of the fun than for the hunting and fishing.

When safely housed in a barn, and Harry had lighted a candle he had brought, the treasures were spread out, and made a curious show. Fred, remembering bitterly what his mother would not let him eat, had emptied the cake box, and now proudly displayed half of a rich fruit cake, a whole cocoanut cake with frosting, and several pieces of jelly and chocolate cake. Besides these luxuries, on which his eyes rested greedily, he had brought a small jar of raspberry jam and another of marmalade; and every pocket was stuffed with raisins, which he was eating all the time.

"I mean to have goodies enough for once," he said exultingly. "We 'll see how much it'll make me sick! — that 's all stuff!"

He did see in due time; but now Harry opened his pack. He had been unable to get at the cake box, but had made a tolerable haul

in spite of that. He had two pies, a lemon and a mince, some lobster salad, part of a cold plum pudding, two pockets full of nuts, a large slice of cheese, and a jar of piccalilli.

In their whole stock there was not a particle of bread or plain meat — nothing but the richest of dainties. To their boyish notions there was nothing amiss; bread and meat and plain food were not at all to their taste.

They celebrated the first night by a feast, after which they spent some time in packing things into shape for traveling, leaving out a choice assortment of cake and pie for breakfast. They then lay down on some hay, and tried to sleep. But whether because of their rich supper or from excitement, they could not sleep, and were up and ready to be off by the first streak of daylight. They felt the need of haste now, for they knew it would not be long before they would be missed, and the rifled pantries would tell of their exploit.

Having dressed themselves in boots and overcoat, with sword, hatchet, gun, and pistol by their sides, and heavily loaded with pro-

visions, the two boys started out along the road. Before they had gone far, however, they were overtaken by a peddler's wagon, which, with two strong horses, was just starting on a tour among the surrounding villages.

It was going their way, and Harry soon made a bargain with the driver to take them as far as he went on their road, and they climbed up to the high seat, very glad to be relieved of their heavy loads.

About the middle of the afternoon the peddler set them down near an entrance to the vast extent of woods belonging to the Adirondack country, and called Brown's Tract, with all their belongings, and not a cent in the world.

Little did the boys think of that, as they entered the gloomy woods exultingly, feeling that they had reached the end of their troubles and the world was opening before them.

"First," said Harry, who as the elder always took the lead, "we must find a place to camp."

"We ought to have brought a tent," said Fred.

"It would be nice," said Harry, "but we had enough to carry without it."

"So we did," said Fred, "and besides, a cave 'll be nicer."

"A cave is just the thing," said Harry eagerly. "Let 's look for one."

They spent the afternoon in wandering about in the search, and by great good luck did find a hole in the side of a hill, which with a little enlarging and clearing out, did very well for a cave. In this they placed their treasures, and then gathered sticks for a fire, and cut some large branches to set up in the ground as a sort of screen before their cave.

It was quite dark before this work was all done, and beside the brightly blazing fire the two tired boys at last sat down, and spread out the remains of their food for supper. They had begun to tire of sweets, but they were hungry, — having never worked so hard in their lives, — so they made a hearty meal, especially Fred, who really stuffed himself, I 'm sorry to say. Then piling the rest of the wood on the fire, they both lay down on the ground,

rejoicing in the freedom of going to bed without undressing. Fred lay on his father's coat, and Harry on his own extra suit, and both fell asleep.

Fred, however, did not sleep well; and after tumbling and tossing for an hour or two, tormented with fearful dreams, he awoke in agony. The fire was out, and it was pitch dark. The horrible phantoms of his dreams seemed before his frightened eyes; but worse than that, a terrible pain made him double up and fairly cry out with anguish.

Harry was on his feet in an instant.

"What is it?" he cried. "What's the matter, Fred?"

"Oh, Harry," moaned Fred, "I'm awful sick, and I've had such horrid dreams! Oh dear!" — as the pain came on again — "Oh, Harry! can't you do something for me? Oh! I wish mother was here! Oh! Oh! I shall die! I know I shall!"

So he went on, groaning, crying, and rolling about in his pain. Harry was very much frightened, but had not the least notion what to do.

"Shall I go and see if I can get some wood and make a fire?" he asked.

"Oh no! don't go away!" moaned Fred. "I 'm afraid to be left here alone. Oh dear! I wish mother was here! She could do something for me!"

"I wonder what made you sick," said Harry in one of the rests between the paroxysms of pain.

"Oh, it was the cake and stuff, I suppose," said Fred. "Mother said it would make me sick, but I did n't believe it," he groaned; and off he went again into a worse pain than before.

Worse and worse he grew for some time, till Harry was thoroughly frightened, and at his wit's end to know what to do.

"Harry," said Fred, when the pain had ceased for a moment, "I can't stand many more such. I think I—I—shall—die. Will you go and tell my mother that I was sorry I ran away, and—and—give my love to Matey."

Matey was his baby sister, and his particular pet, and at thought of her he fairly burst

into tears of grief such as the pain had not wrung from him.

"Oh no, Fred," said Harry, trying to speak cheerfully, though there was a queer choke in his voice, for he had never seen any one so very ill before, "I hope you'll be all well to-morrow, and you can go and see her yourself, if you want to."

"You may be sure I'll do that if I ever see daylight, and can crawl out of these horrid woods," groaned Fred.

After what seemed ages to the boys, daylight began to creep into the woods, and at last Fred was easier, and fell into a restless sleep, and Harry crept out to get some wood for a fire. A fire built, the next thing of course was — breakfast. There was still quite a stock of eatables left, but somehow Harry felt a strange disgust at the thought of them, and could not drive away haunting thoughts of bread and butter, beefsteak, and every-day things that he had always despised. So he sat down moodily by the fire, uncertain what to do.

"Harry," said Fred feebly at last, "I feel better this morning, and I'm hungry as a bear."

"What shall I get you?" asked Harry; "there's some of the fruit cake, and a piece of the mince pie we had last night."

"Oh!" gasped Fred, "it makes me sick to think of them! Why didn't we bring some sandwiches?"

"Or some cold meat," added Harry, "or even potatoes! a potato roasted in the ashes would be delicious. We were fools to think we could live on cake and pie."

"I don't believe I'll ever touch cake again," said Fred. "Bah! it makes me sick to speak of it!"

"Well, let's go out and shoot a rabbit, or something," suggested Harry, whose spirits began to return with the daylight and Fred's recovery.

"I would," said Fred, "but I don't believe I can stand up; my legs feel so weak and shaky."

"Well, I'll go and bring you something," said Harry.

"Oh, don't leave me here!" pleaded Fred. "Can't you catch a fish or something near here, in that brook over there?"

"I can try," said Harry; and so it was settled. Providing a pile of brush for the fire, and settling on a signal in case of trouble, Harry rigged up a fishing-pole, and started off.

But something was amiss with the fish, or with the fisherman, for not a nibble did he get, though he sat there patiently for hours, dreading to go back without something for Fred.

At last he grew alarmed at the long silence, and went hastily to the cave. The fire was out, and Fred lay in an uneasy slumber, his cheeks very red, and his hands burning hot. He muttered and talked in his sleep, and at last Harry spoke to him. He opened his eyes, but stared at Harry as though he had never seen him before, and in fact, was in a high fever and delirium.

Harry had seen fever, and he was now terribly frightened; but what could he do? There was not a person that he knew of

nearer than twenty miles, and he dared not leave Fred alone to go for help, even had he known where to go.

There was absolutely nothing he could do but sit down and wait, and eat some cake and pickles for dinner. After a few hours Fred came out of his fever, but so pale and weak that Harry was more alarmed than ever.

Again he could eat nothing, and again it grew dark. Harry provided a big pile of sticks, intending to keep the fire all night, and, feeling wakeful, he sat there and began to think a little.

"I ought to have known better," he thought, "than to bring a weakly boy like Fred out here, though I never saw him real sick before. His mother took care of him, I suppose, and that's why he could n't eat things. By the way, I wonder how she feels about him now! What would she say if she could see him there, on the damp ground, too sick to move? She would blame me — because I'm older. Suppose he should die! I should never dare to go back. I must try to get him

home—but how can I do it?" Always his thoughts came back to that: "I must get him home, but how can I do it?"

Hours went by, and Harry fell into a light sleep, but was suddenly awakened by a sound —a footstep! in these silent woods!

He started up in an instant. The fire was out. The step was heavy and slow on the dead leaves of their fallen screen; no doubt the step of an animal — perhaps a bear.

He could not see an inch before him, and he dared not move lest the creature should hear. He felt around for a weapon, but could only get his hands on his uncle's big gun. This he carefully drew up to him, and held it ready to strike any animal which should try to get in. He had been unable to make it shoot, with all his cleaning, but it was heavy, and would do very well as a club. He was sure he could knock an animal senseless with it. So he stood there ready. His arms grew tired, and his back ached; still he dared not move.

Sometimes the step moved off a little, and Harry breathed easier, and hoped the creature

was going away; and then, just as he began to think he must sit down, it would come back again, nearer than before.

All this time Fred was sleeping, and more quietly than during the day.

"I hope he 'll be well in the morning," Harry thought, in one of the pauses when the animal seemed to be going away. "If he is, we can go on," was his first feeling; "but what can we do if we go on?" was the next. "We have seen no game; even if we saw any our gun won't go off, and if it would, we don't know how to shoot; I can't catch fish; there seems to be nothing to eat; it 's awful lonesome out here; and — and — if a fellow gets sick it 's horrid. I believe I 'd as lief go on errands, after all."

Now the steps drew near again, and he braced himself for the blow.

"Suppose this bear — or whatever it is — gets in at us, and kills us — or half kills us! Suppose it should get hold of Fred! Would I be a murderer? — for it 's my fault that he ran away; he 'd never thought of it if I had n't put him up to it." So he went on, in that long,

anxious night, thinking, and in deadly fear of the animal, till it seemed to him that his hair must have turned gray.

At last, when his arms were so stiff it seemed as though they had grown to that position, and he was so tired he could hardly stand, a faint light began to steal through the trees. He strained his eyes to see the monster which had frightened him so long. Now he thought he saw it at one side, but the growing light showed that to be a stump! then he thought it was at the other side, lying full length on the ground, but that turned out to be a trunk of a fallen tree. For some moments he had not heard the step, and he was beginning to think the animal must be gone; but suddenly he heard it on the other side, quite plainly, evidently very near.

As quickly as his stiff limbs would move, he wheeled, ready for a blow — nothing was there! Then the sounds came again, and looking down, he saw at his feet — a monstrous *toad!*

His gun fell to the ground. This, then, was

the creature whose hops among the dry leaves had kept him awake all night! For a moment he was furious, and determined to kill that ugly toad; but before his arms were limber enough to use, he thought better of it. In after years he used to laugh at that night's terror, but now he had been too frightened to laugh.

Fred awoke at this moment, and seemed more like himself; in fact, the long fast had cured him. He sat up and looked around. Neither of the boys spoke of what filled their hearts. The woods were gloomy in the gray morning light. Fred looked slowly all around without a word; at last his glance fell upon his friend, sitting silent and forlorn. Their eyes met; the same thought was in both.

"Let's go home," said Fred.

"Well, let's," said Harry.

"We were geese to start out this way," said Fred.

"We were idiots!" responded Harry.

"Let's go now."

"Agreed."

They rose, and as one boy started for home.

"Our things!" suddenly exclaimed Fred, after they had gone a few steps.

"Who cares for them!" said Harry savagely, "let 'em stay; I would n't carry one home."

No more was said; grimly they both trudged on. After walking an hour or more, Fred spoke again.

"Are you sure this is the right way?"

"I don't know; I suppose it is," said Harry, and still they kept on.

Another hour passed — still no end to the woods.

"I 'm sure this is farther than we went the day we came in," began Fred.

Harry stopped. "The truth is, Fred, I have n't a notion which way to go; I suppose if we go straight we 'll come out somewhere after a while."

"Perhaps so," said Fred, "but it 's hundreds of miles to the other side, I believe."

Well, they were lost; that was plain. Every way they looked was a vast depth of woods. Harry climbed a tree, and peered out over

the branches, but he could see nothing but a sea of tree-tops. He came slowly down.

"Did you see anything?" asked Fred eagerly.

"Yes, millions of trees," said Harry bitterly. "Fred, I don't believe we'll ever get out of these woods," and he sat down at the foot of the tree.

"Don't you suppose they'll send after us?" asked Fred, with white, scared face.

"Yes, I suppose your folks will," said Harry. "I don't know's my aunt will, but they might hunt a week and not find us."

"And they won't know which way we went, besides," said Fred, suddenly.

"Sure enough!" assented Harry, aghast at this new thought. "That peddler might tell, but he won't get back there for months, and they would n't think of him if he did."

A silence followed.

It was three days after this that a party of half a dozen men, with Fred's father at their head, who had been searching the woods ever since the boys were lost, came suddenly upon

the runaways. They lay upon the ground, apparently asleep, — Harry on his face, Fred with his arms over his eyes. Ragged, worn out — half starved — it was hard to know his son. But they were evidently suffering, and Mr. Hartley stopped before them.

"Boys!" he said.

Harry started up, but stared as though he did not know them; Fred did not move.

"Is that you, Harry Barnes?" said Mr. Hartley, excitedly. "And what — what ails Fred?"

"Nothing," said Harry slowly, as though half asleep. "He's there," and he looked towards his friend.

Mr. Hartley hurried up to the silent boy, drew his hands down, and shook him.

"Fred! Fred!" he called, excitedly.

Slowly Fred's eyes unclosed, and he recognized his father. He tried to speak, but his mouth seemed parched, and no sound came out.

"He's exhausted — nearly starved," said one of the men.

A little liquid food was poured down his throat, while Harry, who was stronger, ravenously devoured a piece of bread, and rapidly came to himself.

"What have you had to eat?" asked one of the men.

"Nothing," said Harry, "except a few pine seeds — and some leaves."

"Why didn't you come out of the woods?" asked another.

"Got lost," said Harry, looking eagerly at the meat in the provision bag.

In a few minutes a litter was made of branches, and Fred, laid upon it; was carried off by two men, while Harry, leaning on two more, managed to walk.

A few hours brought them to the place where the party had left a wagon; and after one night spent in a farmhouse, and another day on the road, they reached home. By this time Fred was able to talk a little, but he was at once carried to his bed.

Harry went home very humble, begged his aunt's pardon, and resumed his errand-

running without a murmur. His aunt, Mrs. Barnes, was kindhearted and really fond of her nephew, but she was always so busy that she never had time to say anything about it.

She did not think of punishing Harry; in fact she concluded when she saw his face that he had already suffered enough. But the gentlemen who boarded with her, on talking it over among themselves, made up their minds that a lesson or two would n't hurt Master Harry. So a little plot was arranged between them, and amid much quiet laughing each one promised to do his share, and not to let anyone — especially Harry — suspect that there was a plot.

Mrs. Barnes 's sitting-room was the back parlor. Here she spent her resting times, and here Harry had his school-books and desk, and usually passed an hour or two every evening in study.

The first night after the boys had been brought home, as the Barnes family were quietly seated at their work, Mrs. Barnes knitting and Harry with his school-books, there

came a knock at the door. Harry opened it, and there stood Mr. Hill, the oldest boarder, — a gentleman about fifty years old and as good-natured as he was bald-headed.

Mrs. Barnes rose, but he said quickly, —

"Don't get up, Mrs. Barnes; let me come in a minute and tell my business."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Barnes, thinking it rather odd that he should come at that hour. "Take a seat, Mr. Hill."

"Thank you, I will," answered the gentleman, with a curious twinkle in his eye which she did not understand.

"How pleasant your fire is!" he added, for the night was cool enough to warrant one. "It would n't be so funny to be out in the woods to-night. Eh, Harry?"

Harry pretended not to hear, and buried his face in his book as if to master that history lesson was the darling wish of his heart.

Mr. Hill did not notice him, but went on to talk about the weather and other things in the liveliest manner, never giving Mrs. Barnes a chance to say anything except yes or no;

and in fact she was so astonished at the whole performance that she didn't know what to say.

At last in the most natural way in the world Mr. Hill began talking about boys, and especially their fancy for running away.

Then Harry began to suspect that he was talking for his benefit, and resolved that he would n't hear a word. He bent over his book closer than ever, and moved his lips as if completely absorbed in his lesson. Mr. Hill smiled a little, but went on to say, —

"It certainly is strange how every boy thinks he 's going to better himself by going out to fight the world alone."

"I suppose it 's the notions they get from the cheap story books," said Mrs. Barnes.

"No doubt," answered Mr. Hill; "but the queer thing about it is, that with the good sense that most boys have, they can't see the foolishness of it. Now there 's Mr. Dean, a most respectable man, you know; would you suspect that he ever ran away?"

"No, I should not," said Mrs. Barnes; "did he?"

"Yes, indeed! I knew him when he was a boy; in fact we went to school together, and I well remember the dismay and horror that fell upon us all one morning when the whisper went around that Frank Dean and Tommy Strong were missing."

"What! Mr. Strong who lives in E —— Street?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"The very same, and his ill health — you know what an invalid he is — is the result of that scrape."

"You don't say so!" said Mrs. Barnes. "How did it happen?"

"Well, I'll tell you." Mr. Hill settled himself in his comfortable chair as if story-telling were his regular business, and began. He turned his face towards Mrs. Barnes as if he had forgotten Harry and his history lesson, but over the mantel was a mirror, and in that he could see that young man grow more and more interested, the book shut up of itself, and he sat open-mouthed and staring. This was what he wanted, so he went on with his story.

CHAPTER II

THE CAPTURE OF TOMMY

"As I said," he began, "the rumor that Frank and Tommy were missing, and that Tommy's mother was nearly crazy about it was the first thing we heard about it at school. Before school began, Mr. Thomas, the master, with a very grave face, told us that neither of the boys had come home the night before, and asked if any of us knew anything of the strange disappearance, and begged us to tell, because Mrs. Strong, being not well, was so overcome by it that her friends were seriously alarmed about her. But none of the boys knew any more than he did, except that we all remembered that Frank and Tommy had suddenly struck up a great intimacy not long before, and doubtless they had gone off together.

"Frank's father was not worried in the least, —he was sure from the first that the boys had

run away, and from what he had seen of that sort of thing he thought they would soon get enough of it and come back. But Tommy's mother, a widow and very fond of her son, could not believe it. 'Why should Tommy run away?' she constantly asked. 'He had a happy life and was fond of his home. No! I know my boy has not run away from me! He has been kidnapped, and I shall never see him again!' and then she would rave and cry till her friends were afraid she would be insane.

"Two days passed and no news came. On the evening of that day, my cousin Johnny Sinclair, whom I have often heard tell the story, was coming home alone from his father's store about nine o'clock. The house was a little out of the village, and as he passed a clump of bushes in a lonely part of the road he heard a whisper that at first startled him very much. It was, 'Johnny Sinclair, is that you?'

"'Yes; who are you?' he answered.

"'It's me!' said Frank's voice, greatly relieved. 'Come in here; I want to speak to you.'

"Johnny ran behind the bushes, but started

back on seeing, in the faint starlight, Frank with a gun pointed at him.

"'Swear that you won't tell that you have seen me, or I'll shoot!' said Fred in a tragic tone.

"'Why, Frank!' began Johnny.

"'Swear!' cried Frank still more threateningly, cocking the gun.

"'Well, I won't tell,' said Johnny, who feared the gun would go off accidentally, 'only turn that gun away.'

"'That's not enough,' said Frank in the tone of Bloody Bill and others of that ilk; 'swear that you'll do what I command.'

"'Now Frank, that's a little too steep!' protested Johnny.

"'Swear!' reiterated Frank in his deepest tone, taking careful aim at the third button on Johnny's coat.

"'Well, I suppose I must,' said Johnny, 'for I'm sure you'll have that gun off, the way you're holding it.'

"'On your sacred word of honor,' said Frank solemnly.

"'On my sacred word of honor,' repeated Johnny impatiently. 'Now turn that shooting-iron the other way, I've looked down that barrel as long as I want to.'

"Frank dropped the gun to the ground.

"'Now what is it?' growled Johnny. 'Pretty way to treat your friends, is n't it?'

"'Well, you know,' said Frank, 'I had to make you promise, or they 'd make you tell and they 'd get on our trail.'

"'You need n't worry yourself about that,' said Johnny dryly. 'Your father says you 'll come home when you get enough, and it will do you good.'

"'He does, does he?' said Frank sharply. 'Then he has n't put detectives on our trail?'

"'Not a detect,' said Johnny laughing, 'and his hair has n't turned gray; he looks the same as ever. I saw him walking down town this afternoon.'

"'Maybe when years are passed and he has no word from his only son,' began Frank in a lofty tone, but Johnny interrupted.

"'Nonsense, Frank! but by the way,' as

a thought struck him, 'where 's Tommy? His mother does n't take it quite so easy.'

"'Ha! she does n't? Maybe she 'd like to have her darling back!' in a sneering tone.

"'Indeed she would; and Frank, she is very ill, nearly crazy about it.'

"'Well, she 'll not see him for long years. He has cut loose from her apron strings, and I mean to make a man of him.'

"'Now look here, Frank! it 's all very well for you to carry out your joke, but you've no business to drag that boy in, for everybody knows he would never have gone of himself.'

"'Then you call it a joke?' almost shouted Frank.

"'Yes, I do,' said Johnny firmly, seizing the gun that Frank was about raising again. 'Now none of that, Frank Dean! I 've promised not to tell, and I won't; but I will have my say, and I tell you that if you drive Mrs. Strong crazy — as they say it may — you 'll spend your life regretting it.'

"'Leave me to manage my own affairs if

you please, Mr. John Sinclair;' said Frank with great dignity, 'and I warn you not to interfere about Tommy, either,' he added defiantly, 'for I won't stand it; and so I tell you plainly.'

"'There 's no use quarreling,' said Johnny, after a pause during which he made up his mind he must work some other way. 'Now what do you want of me? And be quick about it.'

"'I want you to supply us with food.'

"'Well, that 's cool, I must say!'

"'Only for a day or two,' Frank hastened to say, 'till we make our arrangements to leave this part of the country. We have n't decided yet where to go.'

"'Oh, you have n't!' said Johnny with an inward chuckle. 'Well, I take the contract — for a day or two, but where shall I bring the grub?'

"Frank hesitated. 'Can I trust you? won't you go and bring a posse of men to arrest me?'

"Johnny laughed. 'What do I care about

arresting you when your father decides it will be good for you?'

"'Sure enough! and I can keep mammy's darling out of the way. Well,' he added, 'I will meet you to-morrow night at the big chestnut tree in Smith's pasture.'

"'What time?' demanded Johnny.

"'I have n't any time—but as soon as it 's too dark to be seen from the road.'

"'If I come then will you take me to your hiding-place?'

"'Do you take me for a flat?' retorted Frank angrily by way of answer.

"'Well, then, what 's to make me come? said Johnny coolly, still holding the gun so that Frank could not lift it.

"'You promised.'

"'But I did n't promise to come alone,' said Johnny, 'and I might bring a friend or two; it 's lonesome out there at night.'

"Frank saw that he was caught. 'Well,' he said grudgingly, 'I suppose I shall have to do it—but you 'll have to swear secrecy.'

"'Oh, I 'll do that!' said Johnny lightly,

'and now you may take your gun and go;' and he started out.

"'Wait!' called Frank. 'Could you get me a little something to-night? you see,' he added in a shamed tone, 'we took some things with us, but a fellow gets awful hungry in the woods, and—and—we ate it all up yesterday.'

"'And did n't you have anything to-day?' demanded Johnny.

"'No, except some wintergreens.'

"'Poor Tommy!' murmured Johnny, 'He must be half starved!'

"'He 's no hungrier than I am,' retorted Frank fiercely. 'See here, I don't see why you make so much fuss over him.'

"'I 'll tell you why,' said Johnny firmly. 'It 's because he did not come of his own free will—he was coaxed away by you, and moreover he 's younger than you and not so tough—that 's why!' and he started down the road. 'I 'll bring you something down to our gate in a few minutes,' and he hurried home. He remembered that the cook was out this evening

and he would undoubtedly find the kitchen empty.

"It was as he thought, and he hastily took a loaf of bread and a piece of cold meat, and ran down to the gate, where he gave them into the eager hands of his friend.

"Never was a secret harder to keep than that one, for the town was still talking over the mysterious disappearance, and Johnny found it very hard to keep from contradicting the absurd stories told.

"But he had one thing to think of that required thought; namely, how to relieve Tommy's mother's anxiety, and how to rescue Tommy, for that he was determined to do. The first he tried to do by an anonymous note assuring her that Tommy was well and safe, and would soon be home.

The rescue was harder, but he devised a plan. From the place Frank had appointed to meet him, he had made up his mind where they were hiding. It was a spot known to few besides himself, for it was on his father's land, but he was sure that Frank had found it out.

It was a dry knoll in a piece of swampy land where there were rocks and capital hiding-places, and which there was only one way of reaching from that side; no path, but by following a slight ridge of land one could go dry shod to the middle of what seemed to be nothing but swamp. There was another way to it which he hoped Frank did not know. On the other side of the knoll ran a sluggish little stream, and one bank of this was somewhat higher than the other and could be walked on. It led, however, to a spot two miles away before it struck the road.

"On this he made his plan. The hardest was to get some help without revealing the secret, but he managed that.

"He went to two boys of a class higher than his own, boys he knew he could trust, and binding them not to tell, he asked their help.

"'What I want you to do,' he said, 'is to help me capture a boy who is a sort of prisoner — though he may not admit it — and take him home. I am bound not to mention

names nor places, and you must n't ask me to explain, for I can't.'

"'But you don't expect us to go off on what may be some wild-goose chase for all we know!' said one of the boys, Will Jones.

"'Oh, I know Johnny,' said the other, Tom Wilson, 'and I know he would n't fool us. I suppose it 's that little wretch Tommy, and I 'm willing to help catch him — it 'll be a jolly lark.'

"'So it will,' assented Will, 'and I should particularly like to spite Frank — he 's a mean sneak.'

"'True for you,' said Tom. 'Now boy, what 's your plan?'

"'It is this,' said Johnny: 'to-morrow night at dusk I want you to be with my father's light wagon — if I can't get that I 'll get another — at a place on the road to Walcott's, about two miles from here. We may have to wait there some time, but sooner or later I think we shall find our prisoner and bring him home. I have a plan to get him there. I can't tell you any more.'

"'I see,' said Tom; 'we 'll have a ride anyway, and I 'm with you.'

"'I too,' added Will.

"The next thing was to get his provisions, which was more difficult since the disappearance of meat and bread the night before had made such a row and put cook on her guard.

"However, he managed it by watching his chance when she had gone up to his mother, slipping into the store-room, snatching hastily whatever he could get his hands on, and carefully dropping them out of the window, which was near the ground. Then as soon as he could get out of the kitchen he ran around and secured his plunder, which he hid in the barn, though not before old Grimes, the dog, had taken a few mouthfuls of cake.

"On his return to the house he found a great uproar. Cook had already discovered the loss, and was furious, while Mamma was alarmed, and everybody was talking at once.

"When Johnny came in, he slipped quietly into a corner and opened a book, which he at once became absorbed in.

"No one noticed him except his father, who had been suspicious since the day before, and now was watching for him. One glance at the boy's face confirmed his suspicions, but happily, Johnny was a thoroughly trustworthy boy. His father was sure that he was not doing anything he thought wrong, though he was equally sure he had taken the food.

"'I will wait for him to tell me himself,' he decided, after a few moments' hesitation, —'I'm sure he is not in mischief, though I think he is in trouble — perhaps those runaways!' he added as he remembered the exitement in the village, 'no doubt he is sworn to secrecy,' and remembering the time when he was a boy, which some fathers seem to forget, he asked no questions about it.

"The next morning Johnny stopped him as he was leaving the house and asked him if he could take the horse and buggy that afternoon after school.

"'For how long, Johnny?' asked his father.

"'I can't tell exactly,' said Johnny, 'but I hope to be home by eight o'clock.'

"His father hesitated.

"'I'm sure you would n't object if you knew,' Johnny explained, 'but I can't tell you — only Tom and Will are going with me.'

"'Well,' said his father, after a sharp look at him, 'you may take it.'

"'Oh, thank you!' cried Johnny.

"The evening before this interview, was the one on which he had promised to meet Frank at the chestnut tree. So directly after supper, when it began to grow dark, he told his mother he was going to the house of a friend, and carelessly sauntered out of the door.

"He did go to his friend's house, but soon after he stole cautiously around the back way to the barn feeling very much like a thief, made a package of his eatables, and started on a quick walk for the place of meeting. It was quite dark when he reached it, and Frank saluted him in a rather crusty tone.

"'Well, I thought you meant to flunk.'

"'That 's a pleasant greeting to one who 's turned into a burglar for your benefit,' said

Johnny, turning as if about to back. But Frank changed his tone.

"'Oh, I did n't mean that! but a fellow gets awfully tired waiting, and besides I 'm hungry as a bear.'

"'Why, what's become of that loaf of bread and big chunk of meat?' asked Johnny.

"'Humph! that did n't last long — half starved as we were.'

"'Miss your regular grub, eh?' Johnny put in quietly.

"'Of course — at first,' said Frank gruffly, 'but what you brought now?'

"'Never mind what I've brought,' said Johnny, 'till we get to your den. You know you promised, and I 'm bound to have supper there or nowhere."

"Frank grumbled a little, but at last he consented. 'Only I shall blindfold you,' he said, 'so you can't find your way again.'

"'Then you 'll have to bring me back again,' said Johnny quickly.

"'Of course,' said Frank.

"A handkerchief was tied over Johnny's eyes

and Frank took his hand. A long walk they took through mud and over rough ground, now and then climbing over a log or walking the length of a fallen tree-trunk.

"When the handkerchief was taken off Johnny found himself on the knoll, which he well remembered, and in an ingeniously arranged hiding-place in the rocks a small fire was burning. A rough pile of leaves showed where they slept, and there sat Tommy, or what was left of him after his four days' camping out. He looked pale, as could be seen even through the dirt on his face. His eyes were suspiciously red, though he bustled about and pretended to be having a very nice time.

"'Nice place here!' said Johnny cheerfully. "'Want some supper, Tommy?'

"'Don't I?' cried Tommy. 'What you got?'

"Johnny opened his package. There was a pie, a large piece of cake with the marks of Grim's teeth, and a piece of cold beef-steak.

"'Give me the meat!' cried Tommy, but Frank had already seized it.

"'Here! no grabbing!' said Johnny. 'Divide, Frank!'

"Frank blustered, but he was too much in Johnny's power to refuse, so Tommy got a piece of the meat.

"'Why! don't you like cake?' asked Johnny. 'I thought that would please you best.'

"'Why, you see,' explained Frank, 'when we came out we brought a lot of such stuff, and we both got awful sick of it.'

"'Nothing ever tasted so good as that bread last night,' said Tommy gratefully.

"'And how was the meat?' asked Johnny, with a sudden suspicion.

"'What meat? Oh, this? It's very good.'

"Frank turned red and Johnny looked at him, but he said no more. 'Having a nice time?' he asked after a while.

"'Oh, splendid!' said Frank. 'We built a wigwam, and soon as we get some hooks we 're going to fish.'

"'But it must be pretty dull,' said Johnny.

"'Oh, we shan't stay here long,' said Frank hastily.

"'Where are you going?' watching Tommy closely.

"'We don't know yet,' answered Frank evasively, but Tommy's face lighted. 'Oh, we 're going everywhere! We 're going across the ocean and sail in big ships 'n perhaps we 'll go West and shoot Indians — we 're going to have bully times!'

"'The mean rascal!' thought Johnny. 'He's keeping that boy's courage up by no end of lies. — Don't you have any wild beasts nights,' he said aloud.

"Tommy turned a scared look to the fast darkening woods, but Frank spoke up hastily.

"'Oh, yes, we did have somebody's cat one night, — s'pose she got lost — and an owl or two, and of course the frogs, but we don't mind — they 're rather company.'

"'But I don't like them,' said Tommy earnestly, ''specially when Frank 's away. But we 're barricaded now at night and nobody

can get in,' and he pointed to a pile of stones about as big as Frank could lift, which, no doubt, they built into a wall at night at the entrance to their den.

"'Well, I can't stay any longer,' said Johnny. 'Tommy,' suddenly, 'would you like to go home?'

"'N—o,' said Tommy hesitatingly, with a glance at Frank, 'I'd like to see—' and he stopped.

"Frank interrupted with a coarse laugh, 'He'd like to see his mammy, of course; you know he is n't weaned yet.'

"Tommy flushed up, and at once declared he would n't go home for anything.

"Again Johnny was blindfolded and led out of the woods, reflecting as he went, 'I see just how he keeps Tommy under his thumb. Poor fellow, he looked like a tramp.'

"While Frank was blindfolding him, Johnny had managed to slip a note which he had brought with him, into Tommy's hand, with a look which made him quickly hide it, and not say anything. As soon as they

were gone he drew it out of his pocket and read: —

"DEAR TOMMY, — I want to tell you something about your mother that I don't want Frank to hear, so if you'll do as I tell you I will come to-morrow night and meet you. I shall appoint to meet Frank to-morrow about dusk, and as soon as he is gone, you start off the other way. Climb down the steep side of the knoll behind your den, and you'll find a brook. Follow that everywhere it winds till you come to a fence, where the brook runs across the road, and a little bridge goes over it. There you stay till I come — if you are there first — and I'll tell you my news. I'll manage to keep Frank awhile so you can hurry back, but don't tell him a word about it, of course.

"JOHNNY.

"The next evening when Frank reached the place of meeting he found no Johnny, and after waiting awhile very impatiently, he discovered a bit of paper stuck up on the trunk

of a tree with a pin. He took it down and read:—

"DEAR FRANK,—I have another engagement for to-night, so I leave your stuff in the crotch of this tree. I really think you must start on your travels soon, for I can't steal food much longer—the house now is too hot to hold me, and they threaten to have a burglar alarm or engage detectives to watch the house; that would dish your plans, you know.

"J.

"While he was reading this with gathering anger and alarm, Tommy was running wildly through the woods, following the stream. When he reached the fence and the road he found Johnny sitting there whittling.

"'What do you want to tell me?' cried Tommy with terror in his eyes. 'What about my mamma?'

"'Only,' said Johnny, drawing him down to a seat beside him so close that he could not start away from him, 'only that she 's very ill—nearly crazy because you ran away from her.'

"Tommy burst into tears and sobs.

"'Don't you want to go home with me?' asked Johnny.

"'Oh, no! I dassent!' and he glanced back into the woods.

"'Why not?'

"'I 'm — Frank would be so mad — and all the boys would laugh at me. No,' he added more firmly, 'I 'll not go back — but I wish you 'd tell my mamma I shall have lots of money when I come home, and she 'll never have to work any more. Who 's that!' he cried suddenly, as a horse appeared around a corner of the road. 'Let me hide!' And he struggled to get away. But Johnny's grip on his arm was like iron. 'Don't be afraid,' he said, 'it 's only our horse and some boys you know — Tom and Will.'

"'But they 'll see me!' pleaded Tommy. 'Do let me go!'

"'Not if I know it,' said Johnny firmly. 'Here Tom — quick!'

"Tom sprang out of the buggy, and almost before he knew it, Tommy was lifted in,

seated between two who held his arms, while the horse started off on a trot for home.

"'Where are you going to take me? to jail?' he cried in terror.

"'Is that another lie Frank told you?' asked Johnny. 'We're going to take you to your mother.'

"Then Tommy calmed down and ceased to struggle. When they reached his home, two boys took him up to the door and rang the bell. In a moment steps drew near, the door opened, and the boys shoved him in — so that he went sprawling his whole length on the floor. Then the boys retired.

"As for Frank, he went back that night and found the bird had flown. At first he thought something had carried him off and he was terribly alarmed. Then in shaking out his bed he found the note Johnny had written and he understood it all. For a while he was in a great rage and made all sorts of wild threats, but the long hours of darkness out there in the swamp alone — for he could not sleep — calmed him. He did some serious thinking

that night, now that the glamour of running away was over, and it ended in his resolving to go home and beg his father to send him away to school. He could not quite make up his mind to face the scoffs of the boys.

"The next evening he carried out his plan, and slipped into the house in the darkness and appeared before his father in the library.

"After much talk and many promises, his father consented to his plan, and that very night they went off on the midnight train, and the next day Frank began life in a large school, where boys were governed with a rod of iron, and kept so much like prisoners that there was no chance to run away."

Harry did not find it very pleasant at school the next day. Every boy had something funny or very smart to say. They shouted after him as he went down the street; they whispered to him when teachers were near; they wrote on slates and held them up for him and everybody else to see; and notes to him and about him flew about the schoolroom like a snowstorm.

It would have been worse perhaps if Fred had not been so ill, but as it was, Harry had to set his teeth and bring up all the grit there was in him to endure it. After fighting three of the worst of his tormentors, and threatening the rest, above all after it was announced in school that Fred was in danger of dying, the boys let him alone. But even then they avoided him and plainly blamed him for Fred's illness.

"If Fred should die," he said to himself, as he slowly walked home from school, "I suppose they 'd treat me as if I was a murderer. Then I should *have* to run away again, and make sure work of it that time," he added gloomily.

Harry could not get rid of these thoughts, even when in the evening he sat down in the back parlor as usual and opened his book to study. Pictures of Fred tossing on his bed came between the pages of his history. Calculation of how much money it would take to carry him to New York, where he could ship as a sailor — if he did turn out to be a mur-

derer — disturbed his arithmetic lesson. In fact he was so miserable that he was glad to be interrupted by a call from another boarder.

This was Mr. Jennings, a very particular old bachelor, who lived in the front room over the parlor, and was never quite suited with anything. His beefsteak was always too rare or too well done, his coffee was cold, his bed was never made as he liked it, in fact he was the terror of the household, always grumbling about one thing or another. Harry hated him heartily, and when on Christmas Mr. Jennings, like the rest of the boarders, gave him a new knife, he flung it out of the back window and told Joe Loomis, the boot-black, that he might have it if he chose to pick it up.

But on this particular evening Harry's own thoughts were so gloomy that he was glad to see even his enemy, as he always considered Mr. Jennings — though he was a good deal surprised. Mrs. Barnes was out for a moment, and Mr. Jennings sat down to wait her return.

When she came in, a little later, a smile

crossed her lips, but she looked as if it was the most common thing in the world to receive calls from her boarders in the evenings.

Mr. Jennings was for a wonder all smiles; he talked in a lively way about everything, and Harry sat staring in amazement, waiting to hear what he had come to complain about.

He did n't hear anything of the sort. Apparently everything in the house was charming to Mr. Jennings, who talked and talked, beginning as usual with the weather, and ending, strange to say, with the subject of running away. This did not seem strange, for every one was talking about Fred.

"Did you ever run away yourself?" asked Mrs. Barnes, while Harry smiled to himself at the idea of this prim little fellow doing anything so wild.

"No, I can't say I ever did," said Mr. Jennings; "the nearest I ever came to it was being in the secret of two of my schoolmates who thought this was the way to freedom and happiness."

"And did they find them?" asked Mrs. Barnes smiling.

"Well, you may judge for yourself; I'll tell you about it if you like."

"I should be glad to hear," said Mrs. Barnes, while Harry proceeded to work some of his examples for the next day's lesson.

CHAPTER III

LON GAYLORD'S RUNAWAY

"WELL, I was about ten years old, and one day as I was going home from school I overheard two boys talking. You see, I had to pass a thick hedge around Mr. Gaylord's orchard, and from behind this, as I walked slowly by, whittling a willow whistle, as I remember perfectly, I heard first, 'Now don't forget the pistol.' I knew the voice at once — it was Alonzo Gaylord, or Lon, as we called him. He was a hard sort of boy, and I didn't care especially what he was up to — but the answer startled me, for it was the voice of Will Bartlett, a puny little fellow whom I never suspected of liking Lon Gaylord.

"'Lon, I — I — hate to take that,' he said in a hesitating way; 'it seems like stealing.'

"'Fiddle-de-de! What stuff!' cried Lon. 'Isn't it your father's pistol?'

"'Yes,' said Will faintly, 'but—'

"'And can't you borrow it?' went on Lon. 'You can return it all right.'

"'But I know he would n't like it,' said Will.

"'Do you s'pose he 'll like your running away?' sneered Lon.

"Will was silent and Lon went on: 'Come, now, don't be a baby at the last minute; bring the pistol and box of cartridges—and be sure to be on hand as we agreed.'

"The boys passed on into the orchard and I heard no more. At first I thought I 'd go and tell, and I often wished I had, though I don't suppose it would have done any good. Every boy has to learn by his own experience, and Lon Gaylord was a particularly headstrong boy.

"Besides I did n't know how I could prevent it by telling. Of course the boys would deny it, and of course, too, Lon, who was twice as big as I, would thrash me. Moreover I thought perhaps it was only talk anyway.

"That night, however, the boys disappeared, and the rest of the story I had from Will, who

was a chum of mine afterwards, and partly from my uncle, who was out hunting when —but I must n't get ahead of my story. Will told me that night after all were in bed, he stole out of the house in his stocking feet, and hurried to the place of meeting; a whisper greeted him.

"'That you, Will? I thought you 'd never come!'

"'Why, it is n't after eleven,' said Will.

"'I've been here ever so long. Come on; got the pistol?'

"'Yes.'

"'You better let me take it; I 'm the biggest, 'n' I understand a pistol.'

"Will silently handed it over, and Lon stuck it through a strap he had buckled around his waist, which was already decorated with a savage-looking knife and an air-pistol.

"'How many cartridges you got, Will?'

"'Most a box full,' answered Will.

"'Good; now somebody better try to stop us!' said Lon braggingly; 'I 'd show 'em!'

"After walking about two miles — very long

ones too they found them — the boys came to the barn where they had planned to spend the first night. This barn had, as they well knew, — for they had visited the owner's son a few days before, — a side door which had no lock, and on the hay inside Lon proposed to sleep.

"Lon got his hand on the latch, raised it and pushed; but the door did not open. 'It sticks,' he whispered, and gave it a harder push. 'Will — it 's locked! That old fool 's put a new lock on it!' he said angrily.

"'Now what shall we do?' said Will, who was tired and sleepy.

"'Dogonit!' said Lon, shaking his fist towards the house, 'I've a good mind to break down his old door!'

"'They 'd hear us,' suggested Will.

"'I s'pose we 'll have to sleep on the ground somewhere,' said Lon. 'It 's no matter; it is n't cold; we can sleep anywhere.'

"'If we only had a blanket,' said Will ruefully.

"'Blanket!' said Lon with scorn, 'fore I 'd be tied to a soft bed! We can't carry spring

beds and hair mattresses around with us!' So saying he threw himself on the ground in the middle of a bed of pansies in bloom (as he saw to his dismay in the morning), Will did the same, and so tired were they that they slept soundly till daylight.

"As the morning broke a dignified old rooster, the monarch of the poultry yard, amazed at such a sight on the pansy bed, mounted a fence close by, and called in his loudest tones for everybody to come and see what he had found.

"Unfortunately no one in the house understood his language, but Lon sprang to his feet.

"'Will! Will!' he said, shaking his sleepy friend. 'Wake up! we must go on! That confounded old rooster 'll rouse the house,' as another shrill crow startled him.

"'Shy a stone at him,' said Will, half awake.

"Lon did so, when the insulted bird flew down with such strong language of disapproval that the boys expected to see the house door open.

"'How stiff I am!' said Will. 'I can hardly walk!'

"'That's for sleeping out doors!' said Lon. 'You 'll soon limber up. I'm hungry.'

"'So 'm I!' said Will. 'How far is it to Cary's?'

"'Oh, twenty miles, I guess,' said Lon lightly; 'we 'll get there to-night easy enough.'

"'Let's ask for something at a farmhouse,' said Will.

"'We will soon's anybody's up; it's too early yet.'

"Silently they trudged on. 'I wonder what time it is!' said Lon, drawing out of an inside pocket a small gold watch with a long chain.

"'Why, Lon!' exclaimed Will, 'whose is that?'

"'Well, it's mother's;' replied Lon rather reluctantly. 'She don't wear it much, and of course we want to know the time. I'll wear it now,' and he put the chain around his neck and the watch in his vest pocket.

"'But what time is it?' asked Will.

"'The old thing's stopped!' said Lon, giving it a violent shake. 'It says two o'clock!'

At the first house where they saw people up they went in to ask for something to eat. A woman came to the door.

"'Please, Miss —' began Lon, but she interrupted.

"'Go 'way! No tramps wanted here!'

"'We're not tramps, Madam, we —'

"'If you are not tramps, then you are thieves,' looking sharply at the gold chain. 'Get out, I say, or I'll set the dog on you;' and she shut the door.

"'The mean old thing!' said Will, tears of disappointment and hunger falling on his cheeks.

"'She called us tramps!' said Lon, angrily. 'I've a good mind to shoot her old dog! Don't be a baby and cry for your pap!' turning on Will. 'The next place 'll be better.'

"But the next place proved to be worse, for the man who came to the door called a dog and set him on without ceremony. The boys ran for their lives, and the dog after them. Outside the gate, Lon turned. 'I'll shoot that dog,' he cried in fury, 'if I never do anything

else,' and he made a frantic grab at his belt. *The pistol was gone!*

"'Did you take that pistol?' he demanded, turning furiously on Will.

"'No!' said Will, with a white face. 'I have n't touched it.'

"'Then it 's lost!' said Lon, cooling down, and forgetting the dog in his dismay.

"'Oh! what 'll father say?' wailed Will.

"'We must never go home to see,' said Lon firmly.

"That decision did not give much joy to Will, and he felt not particularly jolly as he plodded along.

"Now, too, hunger and fatigue began to tell on Lon; it made him cross.

"'Will Bartlett, I 'm sorry I let you come! You 're a regular cry-baby! I 'd send you home, only you 'd tattle!'

"'I don't tattle, and you know it!' said Will with spirit, 'but I dare n't go home now the pistol 's lost.'

"Lon had no reply to this, and they trudged on. After a while they came to a cornfield,

where they crept in and ate raw green corn for breakfast.

"A little farther on they met a tramp, a savage-looking fellow with a heavy stick in his hand. They tried to avoid him by crossing the road, but he crossed too and spoke to them.

"'Where you going, sonny?'

"'To Mr. Cary's,' said Lon, trying to pass on.

"'Don't be in such a hurry, boy!' said the man threateningly. 'Mr. Cary 'll wait. By the way, what time is it?'

"Lon took out the watch and the man's eyes glistened greedily.

"'Watch stopped,' said Lon.

"'Here, let me see!' said the man; 'maybe I can make it go.'

"Lon drew back. 'You can't; I forgot to wind it up.'

"'Let me see for myself,' said the man, looking very ugly indeed.

"Lon glanced around. No one was in sight; no cries could be heard; it would be easy for the man to knock them both down, and he looked desperate enough to do it.

"'Come! hand over!' said the man. Lon put it in his hand. He jerked the chain off Lon's neck and slipped the whole thing into his pocket with a grin.

"'Give it back!' said Lon with a white face. 'It's my mother's.'

"'And you stole it!' said the man. 'Thank ye! All the better for me. They can't touch me long's their precious baby stole it first! Thank ye, sir,' with a mock bow. Then his manner changed, his face wore a scowl, and his voice was hard. 'Now, my young sprigs, you better go about your business, and never think of meddling with a gentleman like me,' and without another word he strode off.

"There was nothing to be said after that, and the boys hobbled on in silence, till a farmer with an empty wagon gave them a ride. About nine o'clock they knocked at the door of Mr. Cary's house. Mrs. Cary opened the door.

"'Why, Alonzo Gaylord! is that you?' she exclaimed.



"GIVE IT BACK!" SAID LON

"'Yes'm, we've come to see you; this is Will Bartlett.'

"'Run away, probably,' thought Mrs. Cary, but she knew Alonzo's father and she invited them in.

"At this place the boys stayed a week, having such fine times that they almost forgot their journey and once more decided that running away was good fun. When Mr. Cary, who had been away, came home, he found a letter awaiting him from Lon's father with a request that if the boys were there they should be sent home.

"So the next morning they were taken in a wagon to within a mile or two of home, and there set down to walk the rest of the way.

"First they proceeded to eat the luncheon Mrs. Cary had given them.

"'Mr. Cary must think we are fools,' said Lon with his mouth full of cake, 'to go back home! I know a trick worth two of that!'

"'Why, don't you mean—' began Will, but the look on Lon's face stopped him.

"'And what about Poppy's pistol, you

baby?' he sneered. 'Want to go home and get spanked, eh? Not much, Mary Ann! None o' that for me! I'm going to a bully place I know of, where forty Mr. Carys couldn't find us, and I'm going to build a hut and camp out, and have lots of fun.'

"'But what can we eat?' asked Will, who longed for home and would have gone straight there if he had dared.

"'Oh, we 'll find lots to eat, never you fear,' said Lon. 'It's woods there; none o' your mean farmers. Come! let's go on!'

"A little farther on they turned into the woods, and after a long walk they found a place where Lon said they'd stop. It was a sort of den among some rocks, a cheerless place that a dog would scorn to live in. But Lon said it was easier than building a hut, and so they bustled about to collect leaves and boughs for a bed.

"Will meekly suggested hunting for food, but Lon said crossly, 'Seems to me you're always wanting to eat, Will Bartlett. Go and hunt if you want to! I don't know how to get

anything since that old pistol went and got lost.'

"Well, they went hungry to bed, of course, and after an uncomfortable night Will waked with so bad a cold that he could not speak aloud. Then suddenly Lon remembered that he had heard Will was a delicate boy, and he grew frightened as he saw how bravely he choked back his tears and tried to forget his hunger.

"'Now, Will,' he said more pleasantly, 'we must have a fire and something to eat; I'll set some traps and we'll catch a squirrel or something for breakfast and you must stay and keep the fire going.'

"So it was arranged: dry sticks were gathered and a fire lighted, and Lon went off with his string and twigs to set traps.

"Waiting breakfast till you catch your meat is hungry work. Lon was gone a long time, and after hours had passed he came back with a handful of wintergreens, the only thing he could find that was eatable. Will devoured them eagerly, but they were hardly a mouthful.

"The slow day dragged by and night came again. The fire was kept going, a pile of sticks laid ready, and the hungry boys again lay down to sleep. In the night Lon waked to find it raining, the fire out, the wood wet, and themselves getting soaked. He had a dim feeling that it would n't be good for Will's cold, but it could n't be helped, so he went to sleep again. Towards morning he was wakened by a shriek, and sprang up to find Will quite wild with a raging fever.

"Now Lon was thoroughly frightened, and began to see what running away really is. Now he began to feel that he would even brave his father's anger and the boys' scoffs, if he could get Will home and off his hands, — and in the bottom of his heart, if he could get a good meal to eat, though he would not admit that even in his thoughts. But he was completely lost, had not the least notion of the way home, and he knew the woods were miles wide.

"As well as he could, he calmed Will and brought water in his cap to cool his fever.

Then as morning broke and the rain ceased, he proposed to go home. Will's dull eyes brightened and he tried to get up, but he was too dizzy to stand, and then Lon knew he had a very sick boy on his hands, and his reflections were not pleasant.

"This part of the story," said Mr. Jennings, "came out when Lon was questioned by his father. Will always had very little remembrance of that time.

"Toward the end of the next day both boys were lying on the ground motionless and nearly starved. Lon was startled by the report of a gun not far off. He slowly rose to his feet, threw fresh boughs on the fire and tried to shout, but the sound died in his parched throat. In a few minutes a man came up to them. He was a hunter with a game bag over his shoulder. Lon eyed the bag greedily, but felt too dull and stupid to speak. The hunter shook him to rouse him.

"'Who are you? What you here for?' he said.

"'We ran away,' said Lon slowly, 'and we

have n't eaten for days, and he's sick,' pointing to Will, who lay motionless on one side.

"'Good Heavens! I believe you're starving!' said the hunter, throwing down his gun and jerking a bird out of his bag. Then pulling the feathers off, skin and all, he stuck the bird up on a stick before the fire.

"It was not well warmed through when Lon seized it and fairly devoured it. Meanwhile another was cooking for Will, and the hunter tried to wake him, but he could not rouse him, and he was seriously alarmed.

"'Eat that bird too,' he said to Lon, who was much brighter for the food. 'You will need more strength, for we'll have to carry him out. I hope he 'll not die on our hands.'

"The color died out of Lon's face and left it a ghastly gray.

"'Will he die?' he asked in a scared whisper.

"'I fear he will, unless we can get him to a doctor and help very soon,' was the reply.

"'I'm ready,' said Lon hastily.

"'Take my gun; I'll carry the boy,' said the man.

"A dismal procession was that, and more than once they had to stop to rest, and more than once Lon thought he should sink to the earth. At last the open country was reached and a log house, where the ghastly face of Will was an appeal that at once overcame the people's hesitation about taking in such strange guests. Will was laid on a bed and the hunter turned to Lon.

"'Now, boy, what's his name and where does he live? His friends must be sent for at once.'

"Lon told, and then begged that he might be allowed to go for them.

"'I shall telegraph,' was the reply. 'You are not fit to go, either.'

"That night Will's father and mother came, half crazed by grief and anxiety, and Lon was surprised to see his father too.

"He had not come to take him home, however. He had made up his mind that Lon

would never study. He drove to a neighboring town, bought him some new clothes, and after a talk that Lon never forgot as long as he lived, he put him in the store of a friend as 'boy' to work his way up if he could. The owner of the store was a hard man, but I 've heard that Lon was so thoroughly cured of his wildness that he stuck to his work and made a respectable man, though never what his parents hoped for him.

"And what became of your friend Will?" asked Mrs. Barnes, when Mr. Jennings paused.

"Will was sick all winter, hardly went out of the house, and it was then that I got so intimate with him. I used to go to see him, for I was as fond of books as he was. I used to get books for him out of a little library over a harness shop in the village. We liked whaling voyages and travels, and stories of adventure, — except runaways. Will would never read one of them, it brought back his own story so vividly."

Just here the clock on the mantel struck ten and Mr. Jennings started up.

"I beg your pardon, Mrs. Barnes," he said hastily; "I had no idea it was so late. When an old man gets talking, time flies, you know."

"Oh, I'm sure," interrupted Mrs. Barnes, "I've been very much interested in your story. Please come in again."

"Thank you," said Mr. Jennings, bowing himself out. "When I have —" he hesitated and began again, "When it's my turn," then suddenly interrupting himself, "perhaps I will. Good-night."

Mrs. Barnes went out to lock up the house and Harry piled up his books and slipped off to bed. "It's mighty queer," he said to himself as he climbed the long flights of stairs to his room in the fourth story, "it's mighty queer how many runaway stories our boarders know. I wonder who 'll come next."

"I guess I don't care to see any callers to-night," said Harry to himself the next morning. "I'll go round to Al Conway's and get him to show me about my examples. If any

other boarder wants to entertain Aunt, I'm sure I hope he will."

That evening, feeling very smart and knowing, Harry did as he had planned and spent the evening with his friend, though I must say the arithmetic didn't occupy much of their time.

Soon after ten o'clock, he entered the sitting-room. His aunt sat there knitting.

"Anybody been here to-night?" he asked facetiously as he opened the door.

"Yes," said his aunt, "Mrs. Williams stopped soon after you went and was very sorry not to see you. She wanted you to drive her over to her son's and bring the buggy back."

"Why didn't she come to Conway's after me?" asked Harry, much vexed to lose his ride.

"Oh, I told her you had lessons to get," said Mrs. Barnes, "and of course she couldn't think of taking your time from them. She got Albert to drive her."

"Harry went sulkily up to bed, feeling not half so smart as he did in the morning.

Whether any of the boarders had called while he was away he did not know, of course, but hardly had he settled to his studies the next evening when his particular friend, Mr. King, made his appearance.

Mr. King was a tall, sober-looking person who roomed on the same floor with Harry and to whom he had in times past complained of his hard lot. At Christmas Mr. King was one of the very few who gave him something else than a pocket-knife. He was glad to see Mr. King, and fairly put away his books to talk with him.

For some time the talk did not come near the subject Harry dreaded, and in fact he forgot all about it, but, as the whole town was talking about Fred's illness, it came to pass that he was spoken of, and Mr. King asked Mrs. Barnes for the latest news of him. He was a little worse that evening, Mrs. Barnes said.

"And by the way, Harry," she added, "do you know how his father got on your track the other day?"

"No," said Harry, shortly. "And I don't care," he longed to add, but was ashamed to do so before Mr. King, who looked so interested.

"Well, a common tramp told him, making him pay, of course."

"How did the tramp get his information, I should like to know?" asked Mr. King.

"It seems," went on Mrs. Barnes, "that the boys rode to near the woods with a peddler. Did n't you, Harry?"

Harry mumbled something like "Yes."

"Well, he suspected what they were up to, — I suppose from their baggage."

Here Harry turned very red, for nothing had been so mortifying to him as the boys' taunts on the things they had carried with them, — "As though," he muttered to himself, "we were rich and could buy a proper outfit."

A very queer look, almost a laugh, came into Mrs. Barnes's face, as she mentioned baggage, and even Mr. King had to pass his hand over his mustache to hide a twitching of his lips.

"Well," Mrs. Barnes went on, "he judged from Fred's dress that he belonged to a well-to-do family, and soon after they parted company he met a tramp. The fellow told a pitiful story, and the peddler gave him the information about the boys, and advised him to find out in the village if any boys were lost and sell his news for cash."

"And was he smart enough to do it?" asked Mr. King.

"Indeed he was! he laid around a day or two, made inquiries, and at last found out Fred's father, and then went to him and hinted what he knew. Mr. Hartley would n't listen to him, did not believe him, thought it a scheme to get money out of him; and the fellow hung around till he had gone, and then went to the servants and sent up word to Mrs. Hartley of what he knew. Of course in her distress she caught at a straw. She came downstairs, and he told such a straight story that she believed him and gave him five dollars.

"Lucky for Master Fred," said Mr. King;

"without that clue they never would have looked in the woods, for everybody thought they had started West like most other boys."

"See here, Mr. King," Harry cried excitedly, "we were idiots, I know, and we certainly made big enough fools of ourselves, but we were n't quite such blockheads as to start after Indians."

"I 'm glad of it, my boy," said Mr. King. "I give you credit for more sense than that, but so many boys have done so that you can't wonder it was the first thing people thought of. You see," he went on kindly, "it 's a proof of — something, we 'll not call it by the hard name you gave it — but it is certainly a proof of something lacking in the intelligence of a boy of say fourteen years that he will desert an even tolerable home and expect to make his own way without money and without friends, especially if he goes where there are no people to work for, and not even the common necessaries of life to be had at all."

"Oh, I know it!" cried Harry impatiently. "I know everything now!" he added bitterly.

"Every man and every boy in town's helping to educate me."

"You should be thankful," interrupted his aunt quietly, "that you are left alive to profit by your education."

"And not resent it that it comes somewhat hard, my boy," added Mr. King kindly. "I know how you feel though, but believe me, if you have not Fred's death to regret all your life, you 'll yet be glad that you have learned the lesson, however hard it comes. A boy I knew in the West — the son of an old friend of mine — did not get off so easily, and I 've often thought of the life before him with one dreadful grief hanging over him always."

"What happened to him?" asked Mrs. Barnes with interest.

"The story is a strange one," said Mr. King, looking soberly into the fire, "the strangest I ever heard, but I assure you it is strictly true in every particular. The boy was about fourteen and a devourer of flashy stories, so that though he was a good scholar, and a boy of unusual good sense generally, he got his

head so full of that stuff that he actually thought it would be manly to join a band of tramps."

"Tramps!" echoed Mrs. Barnes.

"Even so," went on Mr. King. "I never knew — I don't think he ever told how he first got in with them."

CHAPTER IV

NED'S ADVENTURE WITH TRAMPS

"'THE first I knew of Ned Burton's runaway he tried to coax a friend to join a band he had got acquainted with. He took him one side after school, and, having made him swear never to reveal the secret, told him that he had got the finest chance in the world, and was going to strike out for himself, and he wanted him to come too.

"'Tell me about them,' said Stan, 'if you're going to.

"'Well, no matter how I got acquainted with these fellows. I know 'em, and they're real true blue and no mistake, I tell you! They're the jolliest crowd you ever saw! such larks! such fun! No stupid books for them! not much! they've cut their eye-teeth, you bet!'

"'But who are they?' interrupted Stan, 'and where are they?'

"'As to where,' said Ned, looking very wise, 'that's their secret, which of course I can't tell. I'll only say I can reach 'em easy.'

"'Well, who are they, then? I hate riddles, Ned,' said Stan.

"'Their names,' began Ned, looking curiously to see how Stan would like them, 'are Jerry-the-Masher —'

"'What!' interrupted Stan in amazement.

"'Jerry-the-Masher,' repeated Ned, 'Bloody Bart, and Tony-give-the-Road-a-Whack.'

"'Ned Burton, you're a cheat! You got those names out of a story!' went on Stan, angrily.

"'Honestly I did n't! 'Pon my word!' Ned exclaimed earnestly. 'They're real names! of course not names their folks gave 'em, but names they took for themselves when they went out in the world, and I've been trying to think of a good one for myself,' he went on.

"'Then they must be housebreakers,' said Stan, 'or else tramps.'

"'That's about the size of it,' said Ned, thrusting his hands in his pockets and standing

in front of Stan with a swaggering manner. 'Now what you got to say about it?'

"Stanley was for a moment too much surprised to say anything, and Ned went on rapidly, 'They're called tramps by their enemies, but they call themselves Gentlemen of the Road. And I don't see as they are so much worse than other people, either,' he went on excitedly. 'To be sure they don't work, but the world owes them a living anyway, and neither does Mr. Jones work, and he's respectable enough.'

"'Mr. Jones does n't work,' said Stan, 'because his father worked hard and earned money enough for his son. He is n't a thief and a scamp.'

"'Shut up now!' interrupted Ned angrily. 'Who is a thief and a scamp? tell me that!' and he struck an attitude as though he dared all the world to come on.

"'Well, Ned,' said Stanley, now thoroughly disgusted, 'if you choose to join a pack of tramps you may; I don't,' and he turned to go.

"'But see here, Stan!' said Ned hastily. 'Wait a minute! I felt so too at first, but they explained things to me, and now it seems different.'

"'Yes, I dare say!' said Stan. 'Fact is, Ned, you've read so many dime novels you ain't exactly sure what is right and what is wrong.'

"'It's right for me to do as I've a mind to!' said Ned in a towering passion. 'And you may be pretty smart, Stan Rogers, but you ain't the man I took you for! You haven't a spark of spirit!'

"'I'm not a man at all,' said Stan coolly, 'and don't expect to be till I'm more than fifteen years old. And as for spirit! I can't see the wonderful spirit in running away for the pleasure of tramping the country and begging or stealing your grub.'

"'Well, Miss Rogers,' said Ned with a sneer, 'go home to your Mammy! Go to school like a good little boy, — so you shall!'

"'Thank you,' said Stan with mock politeness. 'I certainly shall do so, and if you'll take my advice, you will, too.'

"'Get out with your advice!' cried Ned. 'When I want it, I'll ask for it. But mind,' he added threateningly, 'mind you don't tell what I've said to you! If you do, so much the worse for you, and so I warn you!'

"'I told you I would n't tell,' said Stanley quietly, 'so you may save yourself that bluster. Besides, it's not my business, anyway.'

"'I'm glad you've sense enough to see that,' said Ned crossly, as Stanley started for home.

"'It can't be possible that he'll be such a fool as to join those tramps,' said Stan to himself, as he walked down the street.

"But he was wrong in his opinion, as he found out a day or two later, when Ned disappeared from his home and the town. There was much talk over it and some whispers about what he had taken with him. But his father and the family would not say anything about it, and nothing was known for certain.

"The facts were, as Ned confessed afterwards, after his talk with Stanley, Ned made another visit to his new friends and they dis-

cussed among themselves the question of allowing Ned to join them. Jerry-the-Masher was in favor of taking him, but the two others opposed it, partly because of his youth and partly because he had not much property to put into the common stock.

"Ned was so crazy to join them that it never occurred to him to wonder why money was needed to join a party of fellows who begged or 'took' everything they wanted to eat or wear, who paid no board, but slept in barns or caves, and who in fact 'lived on the world, as they said, or, to put it more truly, who preyed on those more honest and industrious than themselves.

"After much talk they agreed to take him in, if he brought enough with him, and Ned went home in high glee, balancing in his mind the comparative merits of two names, one of which he proposed to adopt for himself. Ned-the-Bully-Boy was one that struck his fancy, and the other, which sounded to him almost as fine, was Red-Hand-Ned.

"This important matter was not fully

decided when the hour came for him to leave home. Without a thought of the crimes he was committing, he helped himself to his mother's gold watch and chain and a costly pair of silver-mounted pistols of his father's. Besides that he made a visit to the silver closet and stuffed his pockets full of spoons and forks; and then softly slipped out of the side door, a thief as well as a runaway.

"When he reached the cave in the ravine he found his new friends lying around the fire as usual. They demanded to see what he had brought. Ned emptied his pockets of the silver, which Bloody-Bart at once stowed away in a dirty bundle he carried.

"Ned looked rather surprised, but did not say anything. He next opened the pistol case; the eyes of the tramps glistened. Ned stuck one pistol in a belt he had buckled around him, and handed the case with the other to Jerry-the-Masher.

"That individual accepted the gift with a grin, but Tony spoke up fiercely. 'Here, young one! You think you 're going to wear

that! Hand over! I'll take that shooting-iron!'

"Ned did not enjoy this, but he was in their power and he wanted to go with them. He hesitated — then handed it over.

"'That's the ticket, Sonny!' said Tony. 'Now how much tin you got?'

"'Seventy-nine dollars,' said Ned, not offering to take it out of his pocket.

"'Take it out o' the old lady's purse?' suggested Jerry-the-Masher.

"'No,' said Ned with a flush of indignation, 'I drew it out of the bank; it is my own.'

"'Glad to hear it,' said Bloody-Bart. 'These spoons and things are yours too, I 'spose.'

Ned's face fell. He suddenly felt that he was a thief.

"'Let's see the cash,' said Tony, — 'we can't take your word for it, you know.'

"Reluctantly Ned took the package out of his breast pocket and began to count it before them, but Tony reached over and quietly snatched it away. 'It belongs to the company now,' said he, 'and I'm treasurer;' and after

carefully counting it he thrust it into his own pocket.

"Ned was furious, but what could he do? He had stolen for them, and moreover he still wanted to go with them. He swallowed his wrath, resolving hastily that he would not show his mother's watch, but would keep that to wear himself. But Tony seemed to read his thoughts, for he said coolly, —

"'Oh, by the way, where 's that watch you spoke of?'

"'I — I — ' stammered Ned.

"'Don't say you didn't bring it!' said Bloody-Bart, gruffly. ''Cause if you do, we shall be under the painful necessity of sending you back after it.'

"'I have it,' said Ned, shortly.

"'Seein' is believin',' said Bloody-Bart. Ned produced it, and the above-named person quietly but firmly took it out of his hand and put it in his own pocket with the gold chain displayed outside his wretched garments.

"Somewhat subdued, and realizing now that he was truly one of them, Ned lay down

with the others to sleep. He was a sound sleeper and did not wake till quite late the next morning. At first he was surprised to find himself out doors, but then he remembered with a rush of joy that he was out in the world for himself, and he sat up to look at his companions.

"But where were they? He sprang to his feet. Not a man was in sight, nor an item of their belongings! The fire was out and the brands were scattered. The whole party had vanished as completely as if the earth had swallowed them.

"'They've forgotten me!' was his first thought; 'Or they are playing a trick on me,' was the next.

"This hope, however, proved false, for pinned to his coat he found a note. It was from his chief tempter, Jerry-the-Masher, and it was short and to the point. It read: —

"'You're a fool an' we hain't no use for sech, you better go back to skule we're much obleeged for the things an' regrettin' your pleasant society which we deprives ourselves.'

"Here was a blow! It was some minutes before he could comprehend it and understand that they had only wanted the things he had brought, and, having secured them, had run away from him.

"Rage seized him; he shouted aloud that they were thieves, till he suddenly remembered that he was one himself. Then he shrieked out that they were mean sneaks, till he thought how he had repaid his parents' kindness.

"After a while his passion wore itself out, and he sat there pale and desperate. His illusions as to tramps were destroyed, to be sure. But what could he do? He dared not face his father, it would not be safe to show himself in town — he must run away; but where? and how?

"His thoughts turned to Mexico. The tramps had talked of going there, telling of the wonderful chances to make fortunes without work, in that land of silver, and to Mexico he resolved to go. He had no money, to be sure, but he had not been in the company of tramps so many days without learning

how to travel without money. He would steal rides on the railroad as far as he could and tramp the rest of the way.

"Only one thing; he must have some one with him. There was no fun in being alone. He determined to steal up to the village at night and try to see some of the boys. There was Bobby Slocum, he was sure he would go if he could see him, for they had often planned to run away together.

"It was Bobby's misfortune to be sent out that evening, and to came upon Ned skulking around the corner of a fence.

"A lively talk, a gay picture of the life they would lead, the fun of a trip to Mexico and doing as they pleased, did not quite persuade Bobby, so Ned took another tack and made out a pitiful story of how he had been robbed and deserted, without mentioning the fact that he had stolen and told falsehoods himself.

"This finished Bobby; partly from love of adventure, but far more out of pity for Ned, he consented to join him.

"'In an hour or two,' said Ned joyfully, almost forgetting his unpleasant experience of the night before, 'a train goes through to B——. We can hide behind that woodpile at the station, and when the train stops we'll get on and ride ever so far before morning.'

"The place Ned chose to hide in was under the cars, on the trucks, among the wheels. What put that terrible place into his head is a mystery, but there he resolved to ride, and into one such place he crept himself, while into another, before him on the train, crept little Bobby.

"When the train started, Ned at first thought he should be shaken off, then he was deafened by the noise, and soon he was gasping, choking with dust.

"Such an hour as he passed in that fearful place! jolted, choked, and smothered, in constant danger of a fall, and instant death in a horrible form directly before him! He did some rapid thinking in that terrible sixty minutes. He saw things from a different point of view; he thought of the advantages he had

recklessly thrown away; he began to see the beauty of an honest life; to realize the discomfort of being an outcast.

"But the night was not yet past. Soon after they started he thought he heard Bobby call him, but there was so much noise he could not tell; once again he heard a cry, and answered as loud as he could. Just as the train began to slow up preparatory to stopping at a station where Ned was resolved to get off quicker than he had got on, he suddenly heard a fearful shriek, and horrible to say it sounded right under him! He dared not put his thought in words, but he knew that Bobby had fallen off.

"The train came to a stop, and out from under a car crawled a wretched boy — Ned Burton, or what was left of him — without a hat, white with dust, a face of ashy gray color.

"'Who are you?' gruffly demanded the conductor.

"His lips opened and he tried to speak, but not a sound came from them.

"'Here, give him some water, somebody!' said the conductor. 'He's stolen a ride and I guess got the worst of it.'

"Water was poured down his throat, and then he managed to gasp out that a boy had fallen off just below, and in answer to a question, to tell where they had come from. A passenger heard and turned sharply. 'What's your name?' he demanded.

"'Edward Burton," he answered.

"'I know your father! Here, I'll take charge of you. I heard some inquiry about you yesterday in your home.'

"Now the men who had gone back on the track returned bearing between them — I spare you the details," Mr. King interrupted himself. "The boy died in a few minutes."

"Ned, more dead than alive himself, cowered in the corner with his face covered, and waited for his father to come, in answer to a telegram. When Mr. Burton arrived on a morning train he scarcely knew his son.

"'What's all this?' he demanded, sternly. 'How's the hurt boy?'

"'Dead!' answered Ned, stolidly.

"'Who was it?' was the next question.

"'Bobby Slocum,' came painfully from Ned's white lips.

"'Son of the widow on High Street?'

"'Yes.'

"'My God! it'll kill her! he was her idol. As for you, sir,' he began, but the crushed, humbled look of his son softened him, 'as for you, — we shall see.'

"'You can do with me as you please,' said Ned quietly. 'I'm a thief and — and a murderer,' he added, with a shudder. 'I'm ready to go to jail or anywhere.'

"I will pass over the terrible scene at Mrs. Slocum's, where Ned's father insisted on his going with him to tell her all the particulars, but it made a tremendous stir in the town, and if Ned had n't been so broken down he might have been mobbed. As it was, it took all the nonsense out of him; it was as if he had grown twenty years older in that one night."

"Now look here, Aunt," said Harry, almost fiercely, when Mr. King had gone, which he did soon after ending the story, — "I can't stand any more such stories. I'm not a fool— though you may think I am and I can see as well as anybody how senseless our performance was, but I don't want it hammered into me forever."

"Well, dear," said his aunt, gently, "I did not know anything about these stories, and I think you have had enough myself, and I'll speak to them about it."

Well, she spoke to the boarders at the table the next morning when Harry was not there, and told them she thought they had sufficiently impressed the boy. They smiled and said, "Very well, Mrs. Barnes," and no more visitors came to her room.

But the idea seemed to have spread in some mysterious way and the whole town seemed to have broken out into story-telling.

Harry could not go anywhere without hearing some tragic story about the doings of boys, till he was almost driven to run away again

to avoid them. One day while he was in the grocery waiting for the clerk to draw some molasses for him, one of the group of men who hang around such places began, with a sly wink to his comrades, "As I was saying, Al Collins was the greatest joker I ever knew. Just for fun was the thing he lived for. He never went anywhere that he didn't make trouble with his pranks. It was when he came on a visit to a cousin of his in the town where I lived that I met him."

CHAPTER V

THE TABLES TURNED

"'Al Collins is coming to-morrow,' said Robert Carter at the breakfast table.

"'I'm sorry to hear it,' said Mr. Carter. 'I think he's a nuisance in any place; always in mischief.'

"'Albert is pretty hard to get along with, though he is my own sister's son,' sighed Mrs. Carter. 'I suppose the house will be turned upside down for the next week.'

"'I'm glad of it,' spoke up Susy. 'This poky old town is lively for once when Al's here.'

"'I'm not glad,' said Johnny. 'He's always a-plaguing me.'

"'He does n't seem to get a very warm welcome,' said Robert; 'but I don't know as I'm surprised,' he added, laughing as he remembered the pranks his cousin played the

last time he was in A——. 'I don't suppose there 's a soul in A —— outside of this house who pines for his society, and I don't see that many do who are inside,' he went on. 'However, there's one thing, —he does n't care a continental what people think of him, so he has his fun.'

"'Yes,' said his father gravely, 'he is a selfish, mischievous boy. See that you don't get into any such scrapes as you did last year, my son. I warn you to look out that no bills come to me this year, for I shall take them out of your allowance.'

"'Rob,' said Albert the next day, as they drove up from the station in the dog-cart, 'how are the na-tyves? 'specially my old friend Abraham the Redhead? How mad he did get that night at Blair's,' and Albert laughed loud and long.

"'You did play it rather rough on him,' put in Rob, 'before all the girls, too.'

"'Never mind! he need n't have a red head, then!' said Albert. 'And I haven't got even with him yet by a long shot. Rob,' —after a

pause, — 'I've brought down some stunning clothes. I've got a new tailor.'

"'You had a good enough tailor before,' said Rob, looking with envy upon the spruce city fit of Albert's clothes. 'I should like to live in a city.'

"'I should think you would. I don't see how such a wide-awake fellow as you are can stand it in this slow hole,' said Al. 'It's great fun for a few days just to make the bumpkins hop around and put a notion or two into their sleepy heads; but to live — faugh! I should stagnate.'

"He evidently did not mean to stagnate this time, for it seemed as if he thought of more pranks than ever before. Rob and Susy were hand in hand with him in everything he did, and the one whom they most delighted to see discomfited, and upon whom most of his tricks were played, was the unfortunate Abraham Wilson, or Ra, as he was usually called.

"The first cause of Al's animosity towards him was his refusal to join in their rough jokes and amusements, and another thing

against him was that he was a great admirer of Susy Carter. As soon as Al appeared in the village and began to laugh at his auburn hair, calling him Abraham the Redhead, and making fun of him generally, Susy would join in the laugh and treat Ra with a coolness which of itself was disagreeable, and made him dislike Albert as the cause.

"A few nights before Albert was to go home Susy invited some company to meet him, —all the girls and most of the young men of B——, including of course, Ra Wilson. For this occasion Al was burning to distinguish himself by some funnier thing than he had yet done, and all day he racked his brains to plan something more audacious than ever.

"At noon he had not been able to settle on anything, but the one o'clock train brought — on a short visit to Mr. Carter's — two old friends, military gentlemen, who were great hunters and had come to get a little shooting. No sooner had they eaten a hasty luncheon than they put on hunting suits, and taking dogs and guns, started out for game.

"'Shall you be back this evening?' asked Susy as they were leaving, for they were old friends and she greatly admired a uniform. 'I'm going to have some company to-night, and I should like to introduce you.'

"'We may get back by ten o'clock,' was the answer. 'It's a long stretch to the ground,' and then turning to his servant, who traveled with him: 'John, you may have our dress suits brushed and laid out, so we can dress as quickly as possible.'

"'Yes, sir,' answered John.

"A sudden thought struck Albert; a light flashed over his face. 'I have it!' he whispered eagerly to Susy. 'I'll show you the greatest fun you ever thought of! Oh, it's too good! such a joke! where's Rob? we must make our plans.'

"'What is it?' asked Susy.

"'Don't ask me to tell you,' said Albert. 'It'll take away half its fun, but I'll say this much: you said you did n't believe Abraham the Redhead would come to night. Now I've thought of a capital way to make him come,

and Rob and I will do it and give you the richest sight of the season. It 's the grandest plan ! ' and he rushed out after his friend.

" Rob entered heartily into the plan, and at seven o 'clock that evening they disappeared upstairs, telling Susy not to look for them till about nine, when they would come in the front door like the other guests, and bring Ra with them.

" ' And look here,' said Rob; ' Sue, when you hear a heavy tread on the steps, you run and open the door, so we can enter with *éclat* and not have to ring the door-bell. Oh, it 'll be too rich ! '

" ' Now to get rid of John,' said Al, as they mounted the stairs.

" ' John 's all right,' said Rob. ' I gave Hobbs a dollar to keep him downstairs an hour, and he 'll do it, sure.'

" ' Yes, but we must get him down.'

" So they entered the guest chamber where the two military gentlemen were quartered. John was putting the last finishing touches to the uniform which lay spread out in dazzling

array, ready for instant wear. It was of the most elegant material and richly ornamented, and the breast was covered with gold orders.

"'John,' said Rob, 'if you're through with your work you better go down stairs to Hobbs, he'll give you a glass of something hot after your exertion.'

"'Thank you, sir; much obliged, sir,' said John, as the boys closed the door and crossed the hall to their own room. They shut the door, but Al instantly applied an eye to the keyhole, and in a moment he saw John leave the room and make his way to the back stairs.

"'Now's our time,' he cried excitedly. 'Come on!' and he threw open the door and crept across the hall to the room they had just left. He was ahead, and he ran to the general's uniform.

"'It ain't fair for you to have the best,' grumbled Rob.

"'Ain't it? Who got up this plan, I'd like to know,' sneered Al. Rob said no more, but silently gathered up the major's uniform, and both boys stole back to their room.

"'I must say I feel uncommonly like a thief,' said Rob, when the doors were locked.

"'Pooh! Miss Nancy! who's going to do any harm? Before ten o'clock they'll be reposing again on the beds ready for the owners, though maybe John'll have another job of brushing,' he added with a laugh. 'Isn't it rich!'

"During this talk the boys were throwing off their own clothes, and that done they proceeded to dress themselves in the stolen, or, as Al would say, borrowed uniforms.

"'You better take off those orders, Al,' said Rob.

"''Fraid I'll take the shine off of you?' laughed Albert.

"'No; something might happen to them.'

"'What's going to happen, I'd like to know? What a molly-coddle you are, Bob! I thought you had more spirit! You'll never do for the city, I tell you.'

"This was always an extinguisher to foolish Rob; he said no more, and in a few minutes both boys were transformed into the appear-

ance of a youthful general and major, and were admiring themselves greatly in the glass.

"The next thing was to get out of the house without being seen. By watching their chance they managed to go down the back way and slip out of a side door. Once out they took to the road leading out of town.

"'How far is it to this beggar's house,' asked Al.

"'About a mile, and all the way through the woods.'

"'Well, what of that! You ain't afraid of the dark, are you? Brought up in the woods to be scared by an owl?' said Al.

"'You shut up! I ain't any more afraid than you; though I will say for your comfort that a panther 's been seen around lately. You heard father tell the general to-day, and it was over this way, though a mile or more off.'

"'Pooh!' said Al. 'That 's too thin! Panthers don't show themselves in this old settled country. Your country friends saw somebody's stray cat! Tell that to the marines,' and he marched down the road.

"'It's getting confounded dark!' said Rob, after a while.

"'So it is; and I hope you know the road. For my part I can't keep out of the mud.'

"'I hope you won't get the pants muddy,' said Rob anxiously.

"'Shoot the pants! What's John for! We'll be back in time for him to clean them.'

"'What female relatives has Abraham the Redhead?' began Al, after awhile. 'How many shall we have to scare at the house?'

"'Nobody but mother and sister,' said Rob; 'and the mother's sick, I believe.'

"'Now, Bob, you must let me do the talking; he'll know your voice.'

"'I can make it gruff,' said Rob, suiting the tone to the words.

"'That's pretty good,' said Al, 'but this is more like it,' and he put on a very rough voice and threatening manner. '"Now, Master Wilson, we'll trouble you to go with us! We're officers of the law from New York and are here to arrest you." Then he'll ask what he's done,' said Al, dropping into his natural voice.

"Never mind, sir, what you've done! You know well enough. Don't try any of your innocency games on me! I'm too old a bird to be caught by chaff!" Then I'll turn to you,' said Al, in his natural voice again. '"Mr. Smith, bring out the handcuffs!" Then the female relatives will shriek; the mother'll fall on her knees and the sister'll rain tears on me. "What has he done? Oh, good Mr. Officer, what has he done?" they'll cry and sob; won't it be rich?' he interrupted himself. 'What a lark! This'll do to tell in the city. How the fellows will shout! But to resume: we will take him between us, each hold of an arm, after reassuring the ladies, — if the young one happens to be pretty,— and we'll march him down the road in perfect silence. When we get to your house we'll march up to the front door, Susy will throw it open as we told her, and we'll march in before the company and present to the ladies Mr. Abraham the Redhead. Won't he be a sight! Won't he rage! Oh, it's capital! I never knew anything so rich!'

"If the boys hadn't both laughed at this

bright remark they might have heard a smothered voice behind them; it sounded like a muttered, 'Humph! didn't you?'

"But they heard nothing, and they strode on, still talking over plans and laughing at the fun they would have in giving Abraham the Redhead a tremendous scare, and a deep mortification before all the young people of the town.

"A minute after Al stopped suddenly.

"'What was that noise, Bob?'

"'I didn't hear anything,' said Rob. 'What was it like?'

"'Something in the bushes beside the road, I think,' said Al in a low tone. 'There!' as a low growl saluted their ears. Both boys stopped and listened. They heard the rustle of leaves, and all was still.

"'Pooh!' said Al after a moment's listening. 'It was nothing! Let's go on; this is the horridest muddy road I ever struck!' and they took a step forward, though if there had been a light, two rather shaky boys would have been seen. But now the sound came louder,

and was an unmistakable growl, accompanied by a rustle of branches.

"'Let's go back!' whispered Al in a horror-stricken tone. Then suddenly burst upon the still night air a growl ending in a fierce unmistakable snarl.

"'The panther!' shrieked Al.

"'Save yourself!' yelled Rob, starting off like a shot for home.

"'He's coming,' cried Al.

"Fear lent wings, and through the mud they both tore at the top of their speed. They soon strayed from the road, Al tripped and fell full length into the ditch beside it, but sprang up instantly and ran on. Soon they crashed through bushes, and Rob went headlong over a log. Al's coat caught on a broken branch; he tore himself away; there was a rip and something was left behind. But on they went, scratching themselves on bushes, stumbling over stones, and splashing through pools of mud; all the time close behind them sounded steps in pursuit, and every few minutes came that angry, snarling

cry which curdled their blood and increased their panic.

"Mr. Carter's house was at the edge of the village and the first one they came to. They rushed through the gate and, in their terror forgetting all about the company, they made for the front door. As they threw themselves against it with a wild idea of breaking it down, it flew open and both boys fell in a heap on the floor, nearly knocking down Susy and dreadfully frightening the roomful of girls, who being promised some funny surprise by Susy, had crowded around the door to see.

"'Shut the door quick!' called Al in terror. 'He's close behind!'

"'Who? who?' cried the company.

"'The panther!' gasped Rob.

"'Give me a gun and let me shoot him!' cried one of the young men excitedly.

"At mention of a gun a girl or two shrieked, and nobody knows what would have happened next, but a door across the hall opened, and Mr. Carter, followed by the gen-

eral and the major, who had returned unexpectedly, came out of the library.

"'What's all this?' demanded Mr. Carter.

"The two boys struggled to their feet, for all this had happened on the instant.

"What a sight! hatless, pale, and gasping for breath, with clothes covered with mud from head to foot, the gay uniform torn in many places and utterly ruined! Al had left a part of the tail of the general's coat on that branch in the woods, and of the decorations on the breast, three were gone.

"At this moment there came a ring of the door-bell. Mr. Carter opened it, and there stood Ra Wilson, holding in his hand the missing coat tail. He, too, was out of breath and splashed with mud, but no fright, only an angry light, burned in his eyes.

"'One of you boys left this behind you,' he said hastily, 'and I thought some one might want it.'

"'Were you behind us? Where's the panther?' cried Rob excitedly.

"A scornful smile broke over Ra's face, but

he said nothing. Indeed he had no need to say anything, for every one at once understood that he was the only panther. And then everybody remembered that he had a curious gift of imitating wild sounds, — could call the birds around him by imitating the cry of a bird in distress, and drive a cat into fits of rage by talking to her in her own language.

"The whole was plain; he had scared the boys, and Mr. Carter turned on him. 'This must be explained, Abraham. Come into the library! You, too, Robert and Albert,' as the two boys were trying to sneak away. 'We must go to the bottom of this matter. General and Major, oblige me by coming too.'

"The door was closed on the party and the young people returned to their amusements. They had received their surprise; and lots of fun they seemed to find it, for they spent the evening laughing and talking it over.

"But in the library was a different scene.

"When the door was closed and the gentlemen seated, Mr. Carter turned to Abraham. 'Now, sir!' he said.

"Abraham did not look in the least guilty. On the contrary a new light burned in his eyes and his bearing was manly.

"'Perhaps I carried the thing too far, Mr. Carter. I will not deny that it may be so, though I had no reason to suspect that I was jeopardizing any one's uniform. But I will tell you my provocation, first reminding you that my house stands alone and I have an invalid mother who suffers from nervous troubles, and who is in danger, as Dr. Miggs informs me, of becoming insane if unduly excited.

"'I was on my way to join the company in the other room. When walking quietly along in the dark road, I heard voices and soon my own name, or rather the insulting nickname your nephew has given me, and I recognized the boys. Naturally I wondered why they were going towards my home, and knowing their fondness for mischief, I thought with anxiety of my mother and sister all alone. I turned and followed them to protect if necessary. They were talking loud and laughing, and I soon learned their plan, which was to go

to my home and pass themselves off for officers of the law come to arrest me for some unknown crime, and after frightening my mother and sister as much as possible, to drag me off between them and bring me here in that plight to furnish amusement for your company.

"'My first thought was to fight them, but they were two to one, and though this may not have restrained me, I thought of — I mean,' he stammered — 'I did not — '

"'Tell us exactly what you mean,' said the general severely.

"'Well, then,' said he, while a bright color rose to the roots of his hair. 'I knew Albert would run away, and I did not want to beat Robert because — because of his sister.'

"'The sentiment does honor to your head and your heart,' said the general heartily. 'Go on.'

"'Trying to plan what I should do, I suddenly thought of my trick of imitating animal sounds, and remembered a rumor was abroad that a panther had been seen. I thought

it no harm to frighten them home. They ran so well and so fast that I had trouble to keep up, and I admit I brought this garment in to see how they would explain their plight.'

"'That 's perfectly natural; you have told a straightforward story, and I have no doubt a perfectly true one,' said Mr. Carter. 'Moreover I know you are a truthful boy, and your mother has reason to be proud of you. Present my respects to her. And now you may join your young friends if you choose. These boys we will attend to.'

"'Thank you,' said Abraham, with a bow, 'I will go home, if you please. I am hardly fit to go among ladies. Good night,' and he bowed himself out.

"Mr. Carter sighed and turned to the two culprits.

"'Now Robert, what have you to say for yourself? What excuse to offer for violating hospitality by stealing valuable clothing from guests, and worse, for planning what would no doubt have sent a worthy lady to an insane asylum — if not to her grave?'

"Well, of course there was no excuse to be given except the old foolish one which many boys think should excuse everything, 'I meant no harm.'

"That, however, did not excuse these boys. After a very serious talking to, both from Mr. Carter and the general, they were locked into separate rooms for the night. In the morning Albert was sent home by an early train and a letter dispatched to his father.

"Robert was so penitent that his father at last forgave him, and did not send him away as he thought of doing. But his pocket money was stopped till the uniform was paid for, and, though his allowance was large, it took some time.

"The lost orders were found and brought back by Ra Wilson after half a day's search."

While waiting for his molasses, which took an unusual time to draw, Harry got interested in this story, and finding that it was not a runaway story, he sat down on a box to listen. Just as he was picking up his jug to go, Mr. Morton spoke.

"Is n't that the boy — that Rob — that got into such a scrape when he was a college lad?"

"The very same," said another man, "but that one was his last. He was cured of pranks in one sharp lesson."

"How was it? I never understood exactly how it happened," asked Mr. Morton.

"Well," said the other man, "it began at an evening party where most of Robert's class were invited."

CHAPTER VI

ROB'S LAST JOKE

"'You here yet, Rob?' cried John Remsen banteringly, coming suddenly upon his friend enjoying a quiet chat with Miss Katie Clark. 'Why, I thought you'd gone an hour ago; remember the bell!'

"'I do remember it — worse luck — it's the plague of my life,' answered Rob.

"'You've no idea, Miss Katie,' went on John half earnestly, 'how much trouble I have to get Rob up in time for morning prayers. Why, I almost have to drag him out of bed, always protesting that it's half an hour too early.'

"'Well, five o'clock A. M. is an unconscionable hour to begin a day,' said Rob laughing, 'and if it were n't for the solemn fifteen minutes to pay for it, in Old — I beg your pardon,

Miss Katie,' interrupting himself hastily, — 'I forgot myself.'

"'Oh, you need n't mind,' said Katie laughing. 'I know well enough the fond names you college boys have bestowed on father, — and between us,' she added in a lower tone, 'I don't much blame you. It is horrid to get up at five o' clock these cold mornings.'

"'With a fire just built,' went on Rob, 'and a room like the North Pole. Some day I shall be found frozen stiff, and then won't they be sorry?' he added pathetically.

"'Well, if you'll take the advice of a friend,' said John, with mock earnestness, 'you'll make your adieus to Miss Katie and go straight home; I shall never get you up in the morning.'

"'And then reflect on that awful fifteen minutes!' said Nelly Dunbar, who was one of the group.

"'That dreadful bell!' cried Rob dramatically, striking an attitude. 'It poisons my life! It must be exterminated!'

"'Suppose you undertake the job,' said

John. 'I fancy you'd find it a tougher one than getting up to its music.'

"'Perhaps the bell will be frozen up to-night,' suggested Katie, shivering in her light evening dress. 'I'm sure it's cold enough to freeze anything.'

"'Bless you, Miss Katie!' exclaimed Rob, enthusiastically starting up. 'You've given me an idea, —no sooner said than done! Let's freeze it up!' he added in a low, eager tone.

"'How?' they all exclaimed, drawing a little away from the passing crowd, for this talk occurred at an evening party given by Mrs. Clark, the wife of the president. Rob looked cautiously around to see that they were not observed and then proposed the plan which Katie herself had suggested to him.

"'Why, John and I can go and turn that ugly piece of metal up like a cup, fill it with water, and let it freeze. Then I'll defy old Tim to make it ring, and we can stay as late as we like to-night and finish our naps in the morning.'

"'But how'll you get into the chapel?' asked Katie and Nelly in a breath.

"'Oh, I know where Tim keeps the key,' said Rob, getting much interested in his plan, 'and I can contrive some way to fix the bell. What do you say, John?'

"'I say you're joking,' said John.

"'But I'm not!' answered Rob earnestly. 'I'm in dead earnest. We can do it in half an hour, and not be missed. Come on!' and he pretended to start.

"'Oh, yes, do!' exclaimed Katie. 'It'll be such fun! and let us go, too, Nelly. I've always wanted to see the view from the belfry window by moonlight, and to-night's lovely. Will you go, Nelly? that is, of course, provided the gentleman will allow us,' she added, turning to Rob.

"Rob hesitated at this proposal. To play tricks and get into mischief, himself, he never hesitated about for an instant, — to think of a joke and to play it were almost the same thing in his mind. But to draw two young girls into a possible scrape, one the daughter

of the president and the other of a professor, —that made him pause. But Katie did not leave him long to meditate.

"'Come now! you boys always want to keep all the fun to yourselves! I declare if you back out I'll go alone with Nelly—if she'll consent.'

"This put an end to Rob's slight scruples, and John, who demurred more seriously, was easily overruled by the rest, who had now entered into the spirit of the fun.

"After a few whispered plans the four separated and sauntered away in opposite directions, and within a few minutes each had quietly slipped out of the house as agreed, and met at a certain side gate that led from the president's garden to the chapel.

"The girls had secured shawls to throw over their light dresses, but their feet were clad in their evening slippers and their heads were uncovered. The boys had not been able to get hats unobserved, and so came out just as they were, and in this unsuitable plight the four conspirators took their way to the chapel.

"Rob slipped around to the side door and got the key where he had seen old Tim, the janitor, put it, and unlocking the door, the gay, laughing party went in. Matches were at hand, and Tim's lantern, which the boys lighted; then they all proceeded to the belfry.

"Some old pieces of lumber which they found in an attic room on the way up, served to prop the bell in its upside-down position. The girls held the tongue of the bell, so that it should tell no tales of the outrage, while the boys arranged it securely in its unnatural place. In a few minutes that part was done and the girls seated themselves in one of the openings to get the desired moonlight view, while the boys went in search of pails and water. The lantern was placed at the head of the stairs to light them down and back, and the girls were left alone in the belfry.

"'I tell you, Katie,' said Nelly, shivering in spite of her shawl, 'I don't half like this lonely place at night. Of course there are rats here, and I should be scared to death if I should see one.'

"'Oh, nonsense!' said Katie with her teeth chattering, 'they won't hurt anybody, and do look how lovely the river and the falls look in the moonlight, and what splendid dark shadows Eagle Rock throws over the wood.'

"'I don't care a snap for that,' said Nelly. 'Oh, what is that?' seizing Katie's arm as a strange sound reached her.

"'That 's the squeak of the windlass of the well, Goosey,' was Katie's disgusted reply. 'What a coward you are, Nelly Dunbar! Why, if it was n't so cold here I could stay half the night, just to look at the lovely view.'

"'You 're welcome to stay here,' said Nelly impatiently. 'I wish they 'd come back! How long they do stay! I believe they 've gone home! and my feet are like icicles.'

"'Well as I know Rob Carter's love of fun and jokes,' said Katie indignantly, 'I never should suspect him of such a mean trick as that! and you ought to know John Remsen too well to think he would consent.'

"'Oh, dear! here they come at last!' was Nelly's answer, as the welcome steps of the

returning boys were heard coming up the stairs.

"'Why, how long you were!' and 'Have you brought the water?' said Nelly and Katie together.

"'We could n't find the pails at first,' said John. 'I hope you did n't get tired waiting.'

"'Not at all,' said Katie, 'only a little cold.'

"'We'll fix the old nuisance now,' said Rob exultingly, lifting up the pail and carefully pouring the water into the propped-up bell. John added his, and it was more than half full.

"'Let's get two more to give it a brimmer and make sure,' proposed Rob.

"'Oh, no!' cried Nelly. 'We're half frozen now, and I'm afraid to stay alone! Let's go down! Besides they'll miss us if we stay longer.'

"'I think perhaps we better go,' said Katie, slowly drawing away from her window, 'for they will be sure to notice if we are gone long. But I mean to come up here again — the view is lovely by moonlight.'

"They started down, Rob ahead with the lantern, Katie last, as she turned on the stairs for another look.

"'Come on, Katie!' cried Nelly, half down the first stair. 'Do you want to stay there alone?'

"Katie started suddenly; the lantern was shaded by those who followed it; her dress caught on one of the rough boards used as a prop; she turned back to release it; hit the board with her foot, when it fell with a crash, jarring the nicely balanced bell and upsetting the other board. It all happened in a second. The boards fell; the bell turned over, drenching them all with cold water, and sending out a wild clang upon the midnight air.

"A shriek from Nelly, a muttered, 'By George, now we're in for it!' from Rob, a smothered, 'Hush for goodness sake!' from John, followed the cold shower.

"'Boys,' said Katie's brave voice, trembling half with cold and half with excitement, 'this is my fault! I'll go directly to my father and confess all. You three slip out and run home.'

"'What do you take us for?' asked Rob indignantly. 'Leave you alone to bear the blame? Not for me, Miss Katie! I stand by you,' and he set the lantern down and went back to help her down the stairs.

"'It's nonsense to talk of confessing,' said John hurriedly. 'We must hide,—hurry up! before they get here! we can slip into the chapel and hide somewhere there. We must n't be found out!' and he hastily led the way downstairs to the chapel door.

"In coming out on their wild errand the girls had thought of it only as a pleasant frolic, but in the prospect of being discovered by the scandal-loving villagers it began to look more serious and they were willing enough to hide till the storm blew over. Forgetting their wet clothes they hurried after John and in a few moments were snugly placed in a dark corner behind the organ, the unpleasant nook usually occupied by the boy who blew the bellows.

"It was not a moment too soon, for they were hardly settled when a crowd of half

superstitious, half rowdyish men and boys rushed in with lights and clubs and weapons of every description.

"They found the stairs dripping with water, two or three loose boards on the floor of the belfry, and the bell hanging silent in its usual place, — nothing more. A vigorous search was made, — not a nook or cranny of that part of the belfry was left unexplored. A few strayed into the dark, cold chapel. But it looked too silent and forbidding, and the trembling, shivering conspirators were not found.

"A wordy discussion reached their ears, shrewd guesses were made as to the intention of the catastrophe, and the whole was set down to some of the college boys, of course.

"It was too cold to linger, and after half an hour the place was deserted again, but carefully locked up. Old Tim attended to that and began to meditate a new hiding-place for his key.

"Despair struck to the hearts of three of the listeners when they heard the big key rattle in the lock and thought they were pris-

oners, but Rob whispered assuringly that he knew a way out. And when all was quiet once more and he had carefully reconnoitred and found no one on the watch, he softly raised a window that was over a shed, got out, assisted the rest out, slipped down from the shed to the ground, helped the girls down, and then they started for home. Nelly dared not go back for her things, and Katie undertook to get them to her room by one of the servants, so that no one should know.

"The two girls slipped into the back doors of their respective homes, and the two young men went to their room in the college, changed their clothes, and went back to the party so as not to be missed and to get their hats and coats.

"Katie did not appear downstairs again that night, — in fact she had a severe chill, and after taking off and hiding her wet clothes and getting ready for bed, she called up a servant and sent word to her mother that she had gone to bed with a chill and did not want to be disturbed.

"The story of the bell and the dripping stairs got abroad, with exaggerations and embellishments of course. There was a great deal of talk and many conjectures and guesses, but the real author of that piece of mischief was never discovered. Still it was not much of a triumph after all. Their unusual exposure to the cold in their thin clothes and their subsequent drenching, and, worst of all, their long hiding in their wet condition told upon every one of them. Nelly took a frightful cold which ended in serious illness and kept her in the house, a sufferer, all winter. John's cold settled on his lungs and made them weak for life, while all had the pain of seeing the delicate Katie Clark fade like a frost-bitten flower from that night. Her health had long been an anxiety to her parents, and she might never have been strong, but from the experience of that night she never recovered.

"Rob had an iron constitution and got off with a severe cold, but noticing from day to day the effect of that unfortunate frolic upon his companions thoroughly cured him of his

relish for college pranks. He devoted himself seriously to his studies and surprised the faculty by becoming a good scholar. But that was emphatically his last frolic."

As the story ended Harry took up his jug of molasses to go, but the next remark interested him and he forgot that he meant to start, and stood there holding his jug while the next story was told.

"That Al was a tough one," said another speaker. "I remember a scrape he got into in college. His father was bound to have him go through college. I guess he hoped it would sober him down, but he was as bad as ever and never cared for books. His father took him out at the end of his Sophomore year, and that was soon after the scrape I spoke of that cost his father fifty or sixty dollars to settle, besides taking all his own pocket money. It was said at the time that he made up a pitiful story to his mother, and she gave him what she could spare of the housekeeping money, but Al's father was pretty close with her, probably because he knew she would give every

cent she could spare to that mischievous son of hers."

"What was the college scrape?" asked one of the loungers by the stove. "I never heard of that."

"Nor anybody else hereabouts. It was hushed up around here, but it made some noise in the college town at the time, and one of my nephews who was there told me the whole story. It came near to getting Mr. Al expelled, but he skinned through somehow. The trick this time was on the Freshman class; he was a Sophomore, and of course he would lie awake nights to get ahead of the Freshies — as they called them."

CHAPTER VII

STEALING A BANQUET

"It was one of the customs in that college for the boys of a class, — men they call themselves, but while they act so much like boys I don't think they deserve the name. Well, as I said, it was the custom for each class to have a big spread — banquet they called it — at some hotel near the end of the season.

"That year the Freshmen made their arrangements to have theirs at a certain hotel in the village. They kept the whole thing very secret, for they knew the Sophs would make trouble if they could, for that class, with Al to hatch up mischief, had been all the year more tormenting than usual.

"The arrangements were all made and the Freshmen thought no hint of their plans had got out. But there seems always to be one

traitor in a company or else it 's in the air; anyway, Al got wind of it a few days before it was to come off, and at once set his wits to work to play them a trick. This was a great occasion, and he meant it should be a brilliant affair, an overwhelming blow to the lower class. He planned it carefully, thought out all the details, and took only two of his usual accomplices into the secret, — two that stood by him through thick and thin and were as full of mean pranks as himself.

" The affair was set for one o'clock. Al had found out the hour and the hotel, and early in the morning of that day he appeared in the office of the hotel, and with the most honest face he could put on, told the landlord that the boys had decided to have a little boat race on the river after the meal, and so would like to have it set for an hour earlier, if it would not inconvenience him. Very smooth and polite the rascal was, no doubt.

" That did n't look unreasonable to the landlord, but he asked why the young man who made the first arrangement did n't come to

order the change; he liked to deal with one person, he said.

"Al was ready with his reply in a minute, he had some plausible excuse — I don't just remember what it was — called away by telegraph, or laid up by some accident or something. At any rate it seemed not unlikely to the landlord, and when Al added that he, too, was on the committee of arrangements, the landlord hesitated no longer but said he would arrange it, and all should be ready at twelve o'clock. You see the landlord was new to that town and not up to the pranks of college boys. They could n't have fooled an old hand so easy.

"Then Al returned to the college and quietly spread the news among the Sophs, that they were to feast at the expense of the Freshies at twelve o'clock, and not to mention it to anybody. They understood, of course, and entered into the plan with eagerness.

"Well, as luck would have it, the Freshmen — not knowing of course anything about this interference with their plans — found

that morning that three more plates than they had ordered would be needed, so the chairman, who had made the bargain with the landlord — Ralph Mills he was — went there to request the necessary addition. After this was settled the landlord said casually, 'I understood you had been called away this morning.'

"'Why, how did you hear that?' asked Ralph, suspicion at once aroused.

"'Why, when your fellow committee-man came to change the hour he told me so.'

"'Oh, he did!' said Ralph, jumping at once to the conclusion that this was a trick of the Sophs, that they meant to eat the Freshmen's banquet and be on hand when they appeared to exult over them, and thinking very fast and hard before saying anything more. If he told the landlord he had been deceived, the Sophs would simply find their plan had failed, no banquet would come off, and very likely a fight would result.

"Better than this would be to turn the joke on them, to get even in a trick as clever as their own; so when the landlord went on say-

ing, 'Yes, and though it put me to some extra trouble I agreed to have it ready at twelve,' he said carelessly, 'All right,' and went out to perfect a plan which had instantly occurred to him, to baffle the enemy.

"He hurried at once to another hotel, a rival concern on another street, and explaining a little of the matter to the landlord, asked him to get up a suitable spread for the Freshmen.

"This landlord was up to the ways of college boys and not averse to a joke on his rival, so he said that if they would omit certain dishes that required long preparation he could serve it at one o'clock.

"This was satisfactory. So Ralph hurried back to inform his committee and make the new arrangement with the class.

"They waited till after twelve, when they were sure the whole Sophomore class would be safely in the dining-room of the Hotel Brown, and then posted members of the committee on streets leading to the hotel to warn every Freshman coming to the banquet of the change of place, promising them a rare victory over

the Sophs if they went quietly to the new place.

"Then Ralph went again to the office of the Hotel Brown and said to the smiling landlord, —

"'I suppose the boys are in the dining-room.'

"'Yes,' said he, 'and they're about the jolliest lot I ever saw — but why aren't you with them?'

"'Because,' said Ralph, 'you have been fooled; they're not the Freshmen but the Sophs, who think they have stolen the banquet I ordered. But they have not,' he added quickly; 'our order was for one o'clock, this one was ordered for twelve and I came in to say that my arrangement with you is off — my class will not appear here to-day.'

"The landlord's face fell and he said angrily, 'But what do I care for your school-boy tricks? You ordered the thing and you'll pay.'

"'Certainly, if you'll serve the Freshmen as agreed at one o'clock,' said Ralph quietly.

"'But of course that's impossible,' said the angry landlord.

"'You need n't lose anything,' said Ralph, anxious to quiet the man so that the fun should go on and not spoil his victory. 'I came in on purpose to warn you. You are the victim of the greatest rogue in college, I suspect, — Al ——,' and he described him.

"'Yes, that's the scamp,' said the landlord.

"'Well, he has plenty of money, and if you take my advice and lay your plans, you won't lose a cent, but you must be prepared, for the fun to them is thinking we're going to pay, and they won't relish the idea of cashing up.'

"'They'll have to do it, though,' grumbled the landlord.

"'You better have some policemen on hand,' went on Ralph, 'and not let a boy leave the room till he has paid up. Go on with the meal, so they can't say they have n't had it, but remember to hold on to Al, for if the rest can't pay, he can, and he's the one who ordered it. But he's a tough one, and I warn

you he'll fight, so don't neglect the police help,' and with this he left.

"Well, they say the Sophs had a great time. Excited by the thought of the Freshies' dismay, they became uproarious; they shouted — laughed — told stories — made speeches — sang songs — and in a word, acted like a party of madcaps, all the time exulting in the thought of their great victory. The idea that the banquet was not paid for never seemed to occur to them, for so well was Al known in the town that he could n't get ten cents' worth of anything without the cash. So they all supposed they were feasting at the expense of the lower class and were hilarious accordingly, making jokes about the good things at so little cost to themselves, ordering extras and praising the Freshies' bill of fare.

"As one o'clock drew near, the jovial party began to look for the enemy. Every time a door opened they were all alert to see the dismay in the face of some Freshman, and they had much fun over what they should say and do, and how the boy would look.

"But one o'clock passed and no Freshie appeared, and when this fact dawned upon them and anxious consultation of watches showed that the hour was past, they saw that their trick had been discovered. 'Boys,' said Al at last, 'I believe they 're on to our little game; let 's finish up and go out and see if we can find them lurking round anywhere spoiling for a fight.'

"So they made preparations to leave, when suddenly the door opened and there entered two policemen and the landlord, who said quietly, —

"'Young men, I'll trouble you to pay for the meal you have eaten before you go.'

"The boys looked at Al, who instantly said, 'Why, I supposed the chairman of the committee attended to that little matter; if he did not, he will certainly call and settle — I'll send him at once.'

"The landlord spoke again more sternly, 'Drop that fooling! it 's no use keeping up the farce; I know all about the trick you have played on me; but you 've had a good meal,

and not a soul shall leave the room till it is paid for. Three dollars a plate, gentlemen; cash up! I don't propose to be cheated.'

"'Nobody wants to cheat!' said Al in his loftiest tone. 'The man who ordered the banquet has the money and will pay — I'll see that he does.'

"'Indeed!' said the landlord, now thoroughly angry. 'You ordered the dinner — and I'll see that *you* pay. If you're inclined to fight, why, I have plenty of help here, and if you prefer to go to the station — all right.'

"'But,' said Al in his grand manner, still trying to carry it off, 'is n't it customary for one who orders a spread to pay for it? Your attitude is peculiar — I must say ungentlemanly.'

"'No use talking!' said the landlord curtly. 'If you wish to avoid a big row and a scandal on top of it, I advise you to submit quietly.'

"'Let's rush for it!' cried one boy, 'we can manage three men — come on!' and he made a move, but no one followed, for a glance at the burly fellows with their clubs ready to

knock down the first one who appeared, made them hesitate. No one fancied having his head smashed, and they knew it would be no fun to tackle those old fighters; besides, there was the station house, and the college authorities, and their families as well, all to be reckoned with.

"They saw the case was lost, — they gave in; Al as usual took the lead. 'Boys,' he said, 'I guess we're caught; we don't want the Freshies to get on to this — we'd better settle quietly.'

"'But I have n't the money,' began to be heard among the now crestfallen crowd.

"In the end every fellow went down into his pockets and produced his cash. Those who had the three dollars necessary to settle for their dinner were allowed to go, except Al, who was kept as security for all shortage. At last he had to give up his fine gold watch and chain as security for the remainder of the bill.

"When at last he got out, and appeared rather white and shamefaced among his angry

classmates, who blamed him for the whole thing, and felt themselves not only beaten but mortified besides, he found them inclined, as they said, 'to take it out of him.' But he was, as we know, quick-witted, and when he saw their mood he rose to the occasion.

"'Boys,' he said, 'we must n't let the Freshies get wind of this; you shan't lose anything,' he went on grandiloquently; 'I'll get money from home and make it up to you all, but mum 's the word. Anyway we had a good time and they had no banquet.'

"This averted the threatened storm for the moment, but that evening appeared on the bulletin board, where every student was sure to see it, a printed bill of fare of the rival hotel and a printed slip cut from the 'Evening Sun' describing the grand banquet of the Freshman class at the Hotel Rawleigh on that day.

"Al had a great deal of trouble this time in getting money from home, and at last — as I said — he had to appeal to his father before he could keep his word to the boys

and get back his watch. At the end of the term his father took him out and put him into business."

"I hope that experience sobered him somewhat," said a bystander.

"I do' know — I do' know," was the answer. "It takes a deal to bring some fellows to their senses."

"Another fool scrape!" thought Harry as he went along home. "Seems to me the boys round here are a set of fools — they do such stupid things." Then suddenly remembering his own foolish adventure he said no more, and that evening he listened almost patiently to the story of another boy's getting himself into trouble by his own act.

The next afternoon Harry went to the store as usual on errands for his aunt. He had a list of half a dozen things which had to be weighed and measured and tied up into packages, while he stood waiting. Never was the shopkeeper so slow and never was the talk among the loungers so brisk.

"What seems the strangest to me in all

these cases," said Mr. Wirt, "is that really sensible boys will do such idiotic things — go off without money or friends, and expect to start right in to get a living."

"Not all runaways are so foolish," said a quiet little man sitting on a box over in the corner. He had not said anything before, and all eyes turned upon him now.

"I was over in town on a little business last week," he went on, "and I heard a strange story of two boys who had run away from there two or three months before. They were fifteen or sixteen years old and belonged to two of the best families there."

"Let 's have it," said Mr. Wirt, and the stranger, settling himself more comfortably on his box, began.

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE WILD WEST

"Cornelius Armstrong and Louis Jansen, who were great friends, had for a long time stuffed themselves with ten-cent novels, — the 'Wild West' and Indian-fighting sort, — and had made up their minds to adopt that kind of a life when they had money enough to begin in good style. They had no idea of begging their way or tramping from here to the Wild West. They were used to comfortable living and did n't mean to give it up. So far they were sensible enough, considering the stuff they had filled their minds with. But the temptation of a few hundred dollars was too much for them.

"Young Armstrong — Neal he was called — had a bit of ground his father had given him; and he had a fine crop growing on it when somebody offered him a few hundred

dollars for it just as it stood — three or four I believe it was. It was worth more than that, but it seemed too good a chance to lose to carry out their plans. So Neal took the cash and bound the buyer not to tell of his purchase for a week. He wanted to get away before his father knew of the sale.

"He lost no time in telling his chum, however, and they went eagerly to work to get ready. They fitted themselves out each with a pistol and gun, with plenty of ammunition for both, with long, savage-looking knives for the pocket, belts to hold their ammunition, and various other things they thought would be useful in the wild life they intended to live.

"This done, they stole off one evening to the nearest big city to get their tickets, for it was their plan to stick to civilized ways till they reached the wilds.

"When they stood before the ticket-seller's window and the man behind it asked them where they wanted to go, it suddenly struck them that they did n't know. They knew they

wanted to go west, but to what point they could not tell. Armstrong, who was the capitalist and spokesman, hesitated and turned to Louis, who was unable to make a suggestion. Meanwhile the ticket-seller, who knew boys, had looked them over and made up his mind about them, and he said, —

"'I 'll tell you what to do, if you have n't settled just where you want to stop; you take tickets clear through to California. The road goes through desert and mountains and all kinds of places, and you can stop where it suits you. Then you keep the rest of your through tickets, and if you find you don't like one place you can try another, and wind up in California if you like.'

"This plan struck the boys as about the right thing, so Armstrong brought out his roll of bills and said he would take two through tickets.

"'Will you have a return ticket?' asked the man. 'You may find it very handy and it's good for three months.'

"'No, indeed!' Neal protested. 'We're

never coming back — unless perhaps,' he added, 'after many years.'

"The clerk smiled; he recognized the dime-novel style and understood. He asked their names, for he suspected there would be inquiry for such runaways. But they refused to give them, in fact they had abandoned their old names and adopted new ones of the 'wild and woolly' variety, more suitable to the life they had determined to live. I don't just remember the names, but they were the 'Bloody-Bill' kind.

"'Poor kids!' mused the ticket-seller as they moved off. 'They'll buy their experience dear! I wish I could have induced them to take returns; they'll wish they had.'

"The conductor on the train eyed with suspicion two such well-armed and savage-looking young travelers, but said nothing, though he kept his eyes on them.

"As the train passed on through the Western States and began to approach the desert, the boys kept a sharp lookout for a desirable place to stop, and at last decided to consult

the conductor, a new one who had come on at one of the last of the cities of the 'Middle West.'

"'Can you direct us to a real wild place where — where life is simple and earnest,' began Neal, drawing on his well-remembered novels for terms. 'Where men say what they mean and do what they please?'

"'Yes,' said the conductor slowly, taking in the situation, 'yes, there's a plenty of such on the road; there's — let me see — there's Stedman, though perhaps that's rather civilized, — they've got a schoolhouse, I believe; how would Dead-Man's Corner suit you?' with sudden inspiration. 'That's just the ticket, I should say! mostly miners and cow-boys.'

"The boys' eyes sparkled. 'That sounds like the real thing!' whispered Louis. 'Let's try that!'

"'The through trains don't usually stop there,' went on the very accommodating conductor, 'but if you men want to stop, I'll hold up the train and let you get off.'

"After a few questions and very satisfac-

tory answers from the grinning conductor, they decided to get off there, and toward night the train slowed up, to the evident astonishment of the men and boys who stood around to see the express go by. As the smiling conductor pulled the strap for the train to go on, a knowing wink to the surprised station-keeper explained the state of things as well as if he had spoken.

"'Runaways come to be cow-boys and fight Indians,' was his conclusion, while among the rough bystanders the word went round, 'Tenderfeet — let 's have some fun with 'em.'

"The settlement — one could n't call it a town — consisted of perhaps half a dozen rough buildings, of which two or three were saloons, with generally a room upstairs for beds. The boys looked around for a hotel, but seeing none, at last asked the man who seemed to be in charge of the station, a mere shed. He directed them to a saloon near the track, as the best they had in the hotel line, and there the boys took their way, for they were hungry. They held themselves very straight,

for they saw they attracted general notice, and they were not surprised when they noted the unkempt and uncivilized appearance of the people.

"In the saloon, under an appropriate name which I don't exactly remember just now, they asked for supper and were directed to a sort of rough shed at the back, where at a long bare-board table sat several men eating. As they started off, the man said sharply, 'Four bits for grub!'

"After they had paid, the boys went out and sat down on a bench to a supper of fried pork swimming in grease, and a great mountain of beans, with soda-crackers for bread.

"They were hungry and they managed to fill up with beans, and then asked the man in the saloon if he could give them a room. He laughed uproariously, and was joined by the half-dozen men who stood around. 'A room!' he repeated, laughing again, while the boys grew very red and angry.

"'What's so funny in that?' asked Neal savagely.

"'A room! — a whole room to themselves!' repeated the saloonkeeper; then, sobering himself and turning to the boys, he said, —

"'I can give you some sort of a bunk in the room with twenty other men, and the price of bed and board — my fine gentlemen — is two dollars a day — in advance! 'n that 's better 'n you can do anywhere else in this shebang.'

"Two dollars a day! That would soon use up their little capital, but they did n't yet know what to do, so they said they would take it.

"When the men gathered in the saloon after supper the boys were subjected to questions and jokes and rough fun-making which they did not find at all funny. They tried to carry it off with dignity, refusing to give their names, their family history, and their object in coming to this obscure little place, though as to the latter point there was no doubt that these men guessed their object.

"They were chaffed in various ways and overwhelmed with advice of one sort and an-

other. One suggestion, however, struck them as sensible, — they must have horses, either to hunt game or to go about at all. With horses to carry them, they could go where they pleased, away from these teasing ruffians.

"So, after they had slept, or tried to sleep, in the attic of the saloon, with eight or ten other beds full of men, they had a breakfast like the supper of the night before, with the addition of a muddy-looking mess they called coffee, and then they went out for a walk away from the place, to talk over the situation and plan what they should do. It had been their plan to find a cave or some sort of a shelter to live in, and then to shoot game enough to eat; but somehow such fancies had withered before the coarse realities of the place. The best they could think of now, was to get horses and start off by themselves, — it had been a mistake to come to this rough place.

"They went back feeling better, and made known their wish to buy a couple of horses. As soon as this was known a dozen broncos appeared for sale with glib-tongued owners to

praise their good qualities. Of course these city-bred boys didn't know anything about the points of a horse, but they tried to look wise and selected what pleased their fancy, bargained for saddles and bridles, and after beating down the price till it came within their means, found themselves the possessors of two rather commonplace animals, and not a cent in their pockets.

"With this outfit the boys mounted and rode off, ignoring the saloon-keeper's inquiry if they did n't want to 'grub up' before they went.

"The fresh pleasant air, and the joy of finding themselves at last mounted and set out on adventures, raised their spirits, which had begun to droop in that sordid hole. Again they felt like heroes ready to conquer the world.

"But before many hours they began to find themselves very hungry, and their steeds, too, had lost the vigor with which they started out, so they began to look about for game, while they picketed their horses, as they had been

taught, at a spot where something like grass was growing.

"Wearily they wandered around, not daring to lose sight of their horses, lest they should be lost in this trackless wilderness. A few birds they saw and shot at, and once a jack rabbit sat up and turned his long ears towards them. Both shot eagerly, but the creature — his curiosity evidently satisfied — dropped his ears, turned and fled with tremendous bounds over the nearest ridge, while repeated bullets from the two guns sped harmlessly after him.

"Sadly disappointed and hungry enough to be angry, and even to reproach each other with not being able 'to hit a barn door,' the boys wandered back to the broncos, which — having stuffed themselves with the green stuff, whatever it was — were now restless and tugging at their picket ropes.

"'I guess they want a drink,' said Louis. 'Had n't we better ride on and hunt a stream or a spring where we can camp for the night?' For the sun was already low, and the chill of evening began to be felt.

"Neal agreed and they were soon on their way again, wise enough this time to give their beasts their heads, hoping that it was true, as they had heard, that horses could scent water from afar. They did come to some sort of muddy pool where the animals drank eagerly, but which the boys, hungry and thirsty as they were, could n't bring themselves to touch.

"Well, I can't go over the records of the next few days; the boys never told it all; it is enough to say that they wandered about in that forlorn country, sometimes being able to shoot a rabbit or a bird, eating it, or rather devouring it, half raw, for though they had matches to start fires, they found very little of anything to burn. They came to the mountains, where they found water and food for the horses, but little for themselves.

"Once they came upon a great herd of cattle, whose tremendous wide-spread horns and fierce threatening actions scared them, and when, hoping at last to see real cow-boys, they crept around the herd, they were driven

away with horrible oaths, because they or their animals made the herd uneasy.

"This was their first and last encounter with the heroes they had been anxious to emulate; they sought no more herds, wished for no more cow-boys, and sadly acknowledged to themselves that the stories had lied about them.

"There was still one thing left — Indians, though the air of the country or something else was fast dispelling all their illusions about the wild free life they had pictured. Even this last hope was destined to be rudely crushed, for one day they came upon an Indian settlement almost before they knew it. On turning around the foot of a big hill they suddenly found themselves approaching a small village with neat-looking little houses, each with its garden patch and cultivated fields all about.

"Hoping to find hospitable folk, and to get some civilized food and comfort, they came nearer. As soon as they were seen, the cabins began to pour out their inmates, when the

boys saw, to their amazement, that they were Indians.

"Indians! actually living in houses and cultivating the ground! They had never heard of such a thing. But Indians they were, and not a bit like the Indians of the books. They wore no blankets, but ragged and unspeakably dirty garments of the white man. They gathered around the two boys like a hive of bees; they examined their broncos; they fingered their equipments; they handled their weapons; they begged ammunition, communicating by grunts and occasionally a word or two, of which 'give' was the most common.

"In this way the boys — afraid to refuse the savage-looking creatures — parted with most of their remaining ammunition, with their cherished pistols, with their pocket knives, with their coats — which indeed they did not need in this warm country.

"By this time it was dark, and the Indians by signs asked the boys to have supper.

"Glad to have something to eat, even among this band of beggars, and besides, being



THEY GATHERED AROUND THE TWO BOYS

afraid to refuse, they dismounted, saw the broncos picketed by half a dozen eager hands, and went with their hosts into one of the cabins, where something was cooking in a big kettle on a stove.

"Something — they dared not guess what — was given them in a bowl, and they made a hearty meal, while the knowing looks which passed between the Indians around them showed that their half-starved condition was understood.

"Supper over, they were invited to sleep in another cabin where were rude beds, and tired out, they soon fell asleep.

"They were wakened after some hours by a gentle touch and a soft whisper.

"'Go now!' it said. 'You must n't stay! lose everything — horses, guns, everything.'

"Wide awake now, they started up to see in the faint moonlight a young Indian girl. She was dressed better than most of the Indians, and evidently — as the boys afterwards decided — had attended one of the schools which are trying to elevate the race.

"She spoke plain English, and as soon as they understood and got up, she led them out a back way, where they found their broncos ready. They hastily mounted and stole softly away, and never remembered till the next morning that they had left their guns standing in the corner of the room they had slept in.

"Now, indeed, they were helpless in this wild country. Both boys were by this time thoroughly disillusionized, and acknowledged to themselves that it was a wild, hopeless plan they had made, but neither had admitted it to the other till now.

"'Neal,' exclaimed Louis, 'the game 's up! Let 's go on to California.'

"'Sure!' said Neal warmly. 'Good thing we got those through tickets. I'd have stayed here and starved before I 'd have gone home.'

"'I, too,' said Louis.

"Their next thought was to get to the railroad. In their wanderings they had often been for days out of hearing of passing trains, and they had no idea in which direction to

turn to reach it. Their only way was to go on till they came to a track and follow that till they came to a station. They could n't make up their minds which way to go, so they left it again to their broncos and rode on all day, stopping only to let the animals graze.

" The next morning, to their consternation, they found but one of the beasts; the other had pulled out the stake or picket pin and gone off.

" What to do now was the question; if one of them took the remaining bronco and went after the other, he would be separated from his friend, and to be separated in this desolate country was hopelessly to lose each other. This they would not consider, and they finally decided that they must take turns in riding, abandon the thought of finding the stray, and give their remaining strength to reaching the railroad.

" I don't know, of course, all the details of those last few days' wanderings. When at last they struck the iron track, they could have fallen down and worshiped it. It meant

food and shelter and work and civilized life once more, and they were in a condition to appreciate all these comforts as never before.

"When, after following the rails several hours, they reached a station, — a solitary building; station it seemed for a settlement a few miles off, — two ragged, foot-sore, starved, unkempt youths staggered into the building, and asked when a train for the West would be due, and if meantime they could get something to eat.

"The station agent looked doubtful, for indeed they must have appeared like the tramps they were. But Armstrong hastened to explain, —

"'We have a bronco out here that we'll gladly give for food and a chance to clean up a little before the train comes. We lost our way and our other bronco,' he went on, 'and have been some time without much food.'

"The agent went to the door to see if they had told the truth, and seeing the beast — albeit thin and worn, too — he warmed a little, and telling the boys it was a bargain, took

them into his room at the back of the station, gave them water and towels and combs and clothes-brushes, while he put a frying-pan and a kettle on his little stove, and by the time they had done what they could with water and brushes and combs to make a more civilized appearance, they sat down to a big dish of fried bacon, with crackers and a cup of coffee.

"It was the most civilized food the boys had eaten since they left home — two long, long weeks before. When they learned the day of the month they were amazed to find it was only two weeks. It seemed two months to them, and they felt sure it was a month at least, for in their wretchedness they had kept no count of days.

"This was a flag station only, and the boys had the pain of seeing the express whiz by an hour or two before the more accommodating local held up at the waving of the agent's red flag, and they eagerly stepped on.

"They landed in the city of Los Angeles late one evening with a few dollars in their

pockets, which the agent had given them in addition to their supper, for the bronco and saddle, and asking a policeman to direct them to a cheap lodging-house, they had, for the first time since leaving home, a decent bed in a decent house, and they decided with all their hearts that civilized ways were comfortable after all, and the wild West lost its charm when one came too near it.

"Their aim now was to get work, but first they made themselves look a little less like tramps, with a few additions to their much worn wardrobes and a good bath and a hair-cut. Then feeling more civilized and human, they set out to find something to do.

"Several days they tramped the city, haunting the intelligence offices, but they were unable to find anything they could do. There was plenty of need for workmen, but in every case it was skilled work that was wanted. Gardeners were wanted in the suburbs, but they knew nothing of gardening; clerks, messengers, teamsters, and so forth must know the city; for every kind of work either skill

or physical strength was needed, and of both these the boys were destitute.

"Wandering out into the country around, after their small funds were exhausted, hoping to find employment on a ranch where just now there was a demand for help, they came at last to a small orange ranch where the manager was glad to employ them in picking the fruit. Two of his pickers had deserted, and he had a car standing on the siding waiting for its load, so he was in desperate need of immediate help.

"The boys were equipped with big bags hanging by straps from their shoulders, and, each with a light ladder to carry and a pair of orange-clippers, started on his way. The work did not seem hard; planting the ladder against the outside branches of the tree, the picker went up and gathered all the fruit he could reach, cutting every orange carefully from its stem and dropping it into the bag. When he had taken all he could reach, he moved the ladder along to a fresh place, and so he went on till the tree was stripped. When

his bag was full, and almost too heavy to bear, he carried it to the place of washing, where the oranges were vigorously scrubbed by girls with stiff scrubbing brushes and water, and when perfectly clean were placed on a long sloping sort of tray, down which they slowly rolled — drying on the way — to the bottom, where they were sorted — the sound ones from the 'culls.'

"Here began trouble for the new pickers. They had, it seemed, not been careful enough with their clippers, and many of the finest oranges were found with slight nicks in the skin, which made them unfit for packing, since they were destined for the Eastern market and would spoil on the way.

"As the pickers were paid according to the number of acceptable oranges they brought in, the two boys came out very small at the end of the day, as well as very tired, for the work was hard for a beginner.

"The manager was very angry at the number of fine oranges which had to be thrown with the culls, so he took the boys off that

job, and set them at carrying the fruit, after it was sorted, to the packers.

"The packers were two Chinamen who sat in a shed by themselves, wrapped each orange in tissue paper and packed it in the box in which it was to go to the cars. This was the nicest part of the work, for all the fruit in a box must be exactly the same size, boxes being graded according to the number they held. None but the trained eye of a Chinaman — it seems — could at a glance place an orange in its suitable box, and so two of these Celestials sat grim and silent and packed, and drew the biggest wages of all, while a small army of pickers, washers, sorters, and carriers worked all day to supply them.

"One day the boys worked at carrying, and then the manager gave them the small wages they had earned, and dismissed them, saying they were not strong enough for the work.

"Back they started for the city, to tramp the weary streets again. But on the way they came to a strawberry field where acres and acres of strawberries were just beginning to

ripen, the orange season being about over, and the strawberry season just beginning.

"'We might at least pick strawberries,' suggested Louis, and Neal agreeing, they went to the man overseeing half a dozen pickers, and asked for work.

"He was glad of help and hired them at once, giving them careful directions about the work, which did not seem hard to learn. All day long they worked at this, and at night they could hardly stand, their backs seemed broken and every bone in their body ached, and they had earned very little, at that. They were too weary and stiff to walk back to the city and their cheap lodging-house, so they spent part of their hard-earned wages in a car-ride.

"As they lay wide awake, aching from head to foot, too tired to sleep, and realizing that the weary search for work must begin again in the morning, Neal suddenly broke out with,

"'Lu, I'm ready to go home!'

"'Same here,' answered Louis.

"'Of course, we'll have to stand a lot of chaff from the fellows and eat humble pie to

the Governor, but that 's better than starving to death out here.'

"'Heap better!' answered Louis, 'but how can we get home? Wish we'd taken that ticket-seller's advice and got a return.'

"'I 've thought of that too,' said Neal, 'and I 'll tell you how I think we can manage. We can go to the police station and probably get some one to telegraph home for us; our folks 'll send the money, I know.'

"'I suppose so,' said Louis rather ruefully, 'but don't I hate it!'

"'So do I,' said Neal, 'but we 've found out we were fools and we better own up and take our medicine.'"

Just as the story was finished the clock struck six, and there was a general movement among the men to go, and Harry gathered up his parcels and started on a run for home.

When he reached the house he went into the kitchen way as usual, left his things on the table, and started for the sitting-room to report to his aunt. The door of that room was ajar, and as he came near he heard a voice

he recognized as that of a neighbor, a queer old lady, Mrs. Brown, whom he liked because, on rare occasions, when one could get her to talking, she told stories of the Wild West, where she had spent many years.

It was plain she was telling one now, for the first words he heard were, "There was some sense in *his* running away, for he was n't well treated.

"Another!" said Harry to himself; "but hers 'll be interesting, I know," and he sat himself down on the stairs to listen.

Mrs. Brown went on: —

CHAPTER IX

HOW ARTY WENT TO THE MINES

"You see Arthur Marvin was an orphan, poor fellow, and had to live with his uncle. His uncle was well enough for all I know, but he was a very busy man; he kept the only store in the village and was postmaster besides, so, of course, he did n't see much of the boy. But his uncle's wife was one of those mad housekeepers who can't abide a speck o' dirt or anything out of order — real 'pizon neat,' I calls 'em.

"Well, of course the boy disturbed her, how could he help it! a bright, lively boy, interested in everything out of doors, 'specially live things, bugs 'n caterpillars 'n dogs 'n frogs 'n even snakes. An' now I minds me it was a snake as made the trouble at last.

"The boy had found a snake — a little green one it was — what they call a garter snake, you know — pretty little things, I s'pose,

though I never could bear to touch one. Well, Arty brought it home and wanted to keep it —the land knows why — but he did, and he could n't think of any place his aunt would n't find it, so at last he lifted up the bedclothes and put it into his bed between the sheets. The bed was all made up and he thought it would be safe there.

"Well, it happened that Mrs. Marvin wanted to do something to that bed that day — I forget what — but maybe to change the sheets — anyway she threw back the clothes, and there was that wriggling snake. She gave a screech that brought Old Margaret — her kitchen help — running up to see what was the matter. Mrs. Marvin, it seems, was mortal afraid o' snakes, 'n she stood in the middle of the floor with her hand over her face, screaming, —

"'Take it away! take it away!'

"Margaret could n't help laughing softly to herself, but she had grown up in the country an' was n't afraid o' garter snakes; so she took a towel, — for she did n't like to touch one,

either, and gathered it up and threw it out o' the window.

"'That tormenting boy!' burst out Mrs. Marvin. 'I can't stand it any longer! he'll drive me crazy! if his uncle don't send him away I shall go mad! anyway he'll get a good whipping for this trick; he did it on purpose to annoy me, I'm certain.'

"'Oh, Mis' Marvin,' said Margaret, who was sorry for the boy, — an' indeed he was a nice little fellow, delicate as a girl, an' so pretty-spoken, — 'oh, Mis' Marvin,' she said, 'I don't think that! you know he's awful fond of all live critters! I've seen him petting an old toad, an' he's just wild to have a dog.'

"'The horrid brat!' said his aunt. 'I dare say he'd like to fill the house with beasts, but I won't have it if I can help it, 'n I guess I'm mistress here!' 'n she went muttering down the stairs.

"'Sonny,' said Margaret that noon, when Arty came in from the store, where he had been helping his uncle, 'what made you put a snake in your bed?'

"'Did she find it?' he said in sudden alarm. 'What did she say? What did she do with it?'

"'She was very angry,' said Margaret, 'and she wouldn't touch it; I had to go up and take it away.'

"'Where is it?' asked Arty anxiously.

"'Oh, out in the grass, I guess,' said Margaret; 'I put it there.'

"Arty started out to look for his pet, but at the door he met his aunt and stopped. He had never seen her so angry — she was fairly white with rage.

"'You go straight upstairs to your room,' she said to him sternly, 'and don't you come out till I tell you.'

"'May n't I—' he began timidly, but she shut him up. 'Go!' she said, and of course he went.

"Well, she tried again to get his uncle to put him in an orphan asylum, and they quarreled about it all through dinner — Old Margaret told me about it afterwards — but he would n't do it, and after dinner Mrs.

Marvin went upstairs and gave him an awful whipping, Magaret said, while she stood at the foot of the stairs, tears running down her face, — she was so sorry for him, and not daring to go to his aid, for she knew Mrs. Marvin would n't stop at anything when she was in such a rage. She was just crazy mad, and that 's the truth."

"Well, what happened next?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"Next thing he disappeared."

"Ran away?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"No, not yet; after dark he stole down the stairs, for she had left him all day without food. Margaret tried to steal up with something for him, but Mrs. Marvin kept such a close watch she could n't manage it. He stole down and went out the kitchen door, and that was the last any one saw of him for several days.

"Of course, every one thought he had run away, and his uncle and aunt had a great quarrel about it. His uncle really took it to heart, for though he never said much — his

wife made such a fuss — he was, it seems, fond of Arty. Even Mrs. Marvin grew very white and silent while they searched everywhere and dragged the pond, and advertised and everything, for now his uncle was roused, he was ready to do anything."

"But where was he then?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"No one believed that he was alive — so much noise had been made about him — except only Old Margaret. She noticed, after a day or two, that food began to disappear from the pantry. Doors were never locked in that house. Of course, she thought at once of Arty, but she did n't say a word and was careful to leave something handy, and it always was gone in the morning.

"At last she made up her mind to catch him and see if she could n't help him to get away, for she knew they would find him after a while. So one night she sat up in the kitchen without a light, and waited. Sure enough, about midnight, she heard the door open softly. She waited till she heard him

go into the pantry, and then she spoke quietly.

"'Arty,' she said, 'don't be scared,' — for he started to run, — 'it's only Old Margaret, and I want to help you.'

"Well, she made him understand that she would help him get away, and she told him the plan she had made for him."

"But where had he been all this time?" interrupted Mrs. Barnes.

"He had the cutest place to hide you could think of. It was just under the house. You see the kitchen part was a sort of wing to the main house, and the cellar did n't go under it. It was only a foot or so above the ground and the opening was boarded up. Arty had discovered one of the boards loose at one end, and he could pull it out far enough to crawl in. There the poor boy had hidden all this time, lying on the ground. He was a timid boy, as I said, and he was afraid to start out in that wild country with nowhere to go; you see, settlements were far apart and he was mortally afraid he'd be brought back to his

aunt. His plan was to live there till he died. He meant to starve to death, but it 's hard for a growing boy to starve when he knows where he can get food, so every night he could n't help coming out for something to eat — and every morning he was strong in his determination never to do it again.

"Well, as I said, Margaret had made a plan, the best she could think of. She had a brother who was a miner and worked in a gold mine about forty miles from that place. This brother had a good position in the mine — he was n't a common miner, and she knew that if she could get Arty there he would do what he could for him.

"So she told Arty her plan, and he was very glad to do what she proposed — for if he could get away from his aunt he had no desire to die. So the next night when he came up, she had his other suit of clothes all brushed and ready for him, and water for him to wash, and after a good supper she got him into decent clothes, gave him a bag of food to eat on the way, and pinned inside his

clothes a letter she had written to her brother. She had no money to give him, for she got her wages quarterly and they were not due for a month, but she told him he must travel by night and hide by day, because he had been advertised and described.

"She impressed on his memory the name of the mine he was to go to, and the fact that he was to follow the main road and not leave it except to hide during the day.

"With these directions Arty started off for the long tramp to the 'Nancy Grey' mine. Old Margaret's tears used to run down her cheeks, when she told me long years afterwards how she felt when the poor little fellow started off alone in the dark for his dreary walk across that wild, solitary country. Whether he would ever reach the mine or perish on the way, she did not know, but it was the very best she could do for him — of that she was sure."

"I hope he got there safely," said Mrs. Barnes.

"Yes, he did, after several days' — or rather

nights' — hard tramping. Once he strayed from the road in the dark and got lost, and it was a day or two before he found the stage road again. Margaret's brother was a kind-hearted Irishman — like Margaret herself — and he took to the poor little fellow at once and tried to find work for him."

"I should n't think there was anything about a mine that such a boy could do," said Mrs. Barnes.

"There was only one place for a little fellow, and that was already filled, but Margaret's brother kept Arty in his own cabin a week or two, where he worked enough to pay his board, until the boy ahead of him got a better place, and then Arty was made a nipper."

"What in the world is a nipper?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"Well, near as I understand it from what Margaret told me, a nipper is a boy who waits on the miners, — brings them powder for the blasting they 're always doing, you know. At certain times Arty had to take powder in a case all ready to go off. He

would start down the shaft, stop at the first station and take the powder wanted to the men there, then go on down to the next station, and so on till all were served.

"He was a clever little fellow, as I said, and a trick he played on some thieves made him friends among the mining people. You see, that mine was big and rambling, and part of it had been abandoned for some years, while a richer part was being worked.

"That abandoned part — as is the custom — had been leased to some miners who were working it, hoping to make a strike. Well, after a while Arty began to find that his powder gave out before he got to the last station, and he would have to go back for more. Then those who gave him the powder began to grumble at the great amount used. They suspected the men who had leased that part of the mine, but they were very indignant when accused, and indeed they all nearly came to blows about it.

"Now Arty was a bright boy, and he thought of a way to find out the thief for sure.

He said nothing to anybody, but one day he took with him what they call a gun. It was in fact a sort of 'squirt gun,' made of a piece of pipe which the miners used to draw up mud and water. This Arty filled with red paint which was being used about the buildings, and at the first station where he stopped to deliver powder he hid himself near the shaft for a short time; but no one came to disturb the powder. At the next station he did the same, and his patience was rewarded, for in a few minutes he heard stealthy steps, and when he thought the thief was at the shaft, he turned his gun that way and let fly. There was a sudden cry and steps ran away, and Arty went back and told the men in charge of the powder to look out for red paint. Sure enough, when the leasers came to the surface one of them was a sight! He had some excuse ready, but when he was charged with the theft he could not deny it."

"That was a cute trick," said Mrs. Barnes. while Harry outside on the stairs could hardly keep from laughing out loud.

"Yes, it was, and — as I said — it made him friends. He was a real pet among the rude men. He worked hard — too hard, Margaret used to say — for such a delicate boy, and he never got over the exposure of his life under the house. He seemed to have but one thought — how to repay Margaret for saving him. He worked out of hours for his board, and saved every penny he could earn in any way. He made friends with some officers of the company, and his story got around among those in power, so that they favored him in every way they could. After he had been there two years and everybody saw that he could not live, they even let him buy a bit of stock in the company, hoping — as he told Margaret's brother — it would be worth something to Margaret some day.

"Then a wonderful thing happened, — at least it seemed wonderful, though it is common enough in mining. They suddenly struck a rich vein of ore, and the stock of the mine went up with a jump. No one was so happy over it as little Arty, for now he knew his bit

of stock would really be worth something to the woman who had been his friend. I always suspected his friends added a bit to his stock, for when the boy died, enough stood in his name to make Margaret independent for life. She bought with it a little cabin and a bit of ground in the village, and supported herself by the vegetables she raised — she being the daughter of a fine gardener in the old country, and very fond of working out of doors."

"Did his uncle and aunt ever know about all this?" asked Mrs. Barnes.

"Yes, they did; Margaret did n't mean to tell them, but when she got the letter from her brother telling how the boy had worked for her, and actually made a will, by advice of his friends, and had sent her his love the last thing when he was dying, — when she got this letter she could n't help rushing into the sitting-room where Mr. and Mrs. Marvin were, and telling the whole story, — how she had helped him off, how he had suffered, how he had saved all his money for her, crying all the time, and calling him her poor baby."

"What did they say to that?"

"They were confounded, of course, — they supposed he was dead long ago. Mr. Marvin was overcome by sorrow and shame, but the aunt was hard to the last. When it was known that he had left a little money, she had the face to insist on her husband's trying to get it, as the boy's only kin, and the will of a minor being no good. But Mr. Marvin steadily refused, and when I knew Margaret she was one of the cheeriest and happiest old women I ever knew. Only when she got to talking about her boy — she always cried from the first word to the last.

"But only look at the clock!" she broke out in altered tone. "My supper 'll be late and my old man always comes home so hungry! I always forget myself when I tell Old Margaret's story, but the runaway stories everybody's telling just now made me think of it. How's Harry?" she added in a lower tone, on which, not waiting to hear his aunt's answer, Harry stole away from the stairs into the kitchen and shut the outside door with a bang as if he had

just come in. When he reached the sitting-room the story-teller was gone, and his aunt sat quietly sewing by the fire.

By this time Harry was getting so used to stories about boys that everywhere he went he expected to hear one, and I 'm bound to say he was rarely disappointed. There really seemed to be an epidemic of story-telling in the village.

The morning after hearing Mrs. Brown's story he went to the grocery, as usual, for his aunt, and his entrance seemed to interrupt a conversation between the men who generally lounged there.

The first words he heard interested him, and he put down the basket he had brought to carry home his packages, and took a seat on a nail-keg by the door, hoping that no one had noticed him.

The words he heard were: "That reminds me of a joke played by a boy I once knew, George Allen by name. He was a great joker, always looking out for a chance for fun, as he called it."

"Boys' fun sometimes turns out pretty serious business," said Mr. Jones.

"Yes, it did this time," said Mr. Haskell.

"What was his notion of fun?" asked Mr. Jones. "Tell us the story."

CHAPTER X

HOW GEORGE PLAYED BURGLAR

"George Allen had an old aunt living out in the country who could hardly ever be induced to come to the city, she had such a horror of its wickedness. Confidence men and kidnappers, she thought, walked the streets by day, but her pet dread was the burglar who prowled by night.

"When she did consent to visit her brother's family in the city she inspected the locks with the greatest care, and insisted on having bolts on her doors.

"Now this was thought to be very funny by Master George, and when one morning his mother told him his Aunt Maria was coming to see them, he thought instantly that this would be a good chance for a joke. He was fond of his Aunt Maria, and had spent many a delightful summer at her house in the

country, and he had no wish to do her any harm, only — as he thought — to give her a little scare, and then have a good laugh with her about it.

"His plan was simple. His room and the room she would occupy were side by side, and both windows were above a porch covered with vines. Upon this porch and into his window, George had often climbed for the fun of it, and his plan now was to climb up and make his aunt think him a burglar.

"So that night, after Aunt Maria had seen to the locking of the doors and gone to bed, George slipped off his shoes and sneaked out of a side door when no one heard him, and went into the yard. He waited till the light went out in his aunt's room and then he began to climb up the bars which held the vines. He did not try to be too still; he wanted his aunt to hear, and he knew she had not closed her window. The vines rustled and the trellis creaked as he mounted till his head appeared above the edge.

"Meanwhile Aunt Maria was wide awake,

and had heard his first step upon the walk. It was a burglar, of course, she thought, and she began to think what she should do.

"George expected that she would cry out and alarm the house, or faint away, or something like that. But Aunt Maria was not that kind, — her way was to fight. So when she heard the stealthy night visitor, she thought what she could do. She had no weapon; she did n't want to knock him down with a chair, — though she thought of that, — but suddenly her plan occurred to her.

"She had brought to her city sister some of her own superior country yeast, which she contended was better than anything in the city, — a great stone bottle of it, which still stood on the table where she had unpacked it and forgotten to take it down stairs.

"Now the nature of yeast when it gets to 'working,' as it is called, is to become very lively and impatient of restraint. So the bottle or jug holding it has to be firmly corked and the cork fastened down.

"'I'll shoot him with my yeast,' thought Aunt Maria, with a pang at wasting such good stuff. 'That won't hurt him, but it'll drive him away and show him that folks are awake.'

"She quite forgot that the cork would fly with the yeast, and if she were a good shot that might hurt.

"So she got her jug of yeast and a pair of scissors to cut the stout string that held the cork in, and placed herself near the window, where by the faint light of the street lamps she could see when a head appeared above the porch roof; then she shook the jug to make the yeast 'lively,' and waited.

"When George's head appeared she pointed the neck of the jug towards it, gave an extra shake and — cut the string!

"There was an explosion of escaping yeast, a smothered cry, and a heavy fall onto the ground below.

"'I hope I didn't hurt him,' said Aunt Maria anxiously. 'I didn't mean to really hit him — and goodness me! I forgot the cork! but I guess it'll stop his breaking into folks'

houses for a while, anyway.' So thinking, she closed her window and went to bed.

"The next morning, when she went down stairs, she was greeted with strange news. George, she was told, had stumbled and fallen over the porch steps and had broken his leg, and was at that moment in the hands of the doctors who were setting it.

"'But what I don't understand,' said his mother anxiously, 'is, how he happened to be out at that time of night, and without his shoes, too. But he won't say a word about it.'

"'How did you happen to find him?' asked Aunt Maria, in consternation at the injury she had done to her favorite nephew.

"'He dragged himself to the door and managed to ring the bell,' said his mother, 'and besides the broken leg, he 's got something in his eyes and hair that had to be washed out, and we 're afraid will seriously affect his sight.'

"Aunt Maria was horrified. She came near exclaiming, 'It 's only yeast, and it won't hurt him,' but she restrained herself just in time.

"Now followed a long, tedious time for George Allen, lying on that bed while the leg healed. He missed the ball match in which he had a prominent place; he had to give up the little three or four days' trip taken by his class; above all, being unable to study and take his examinations, he missed the promotion in school on which he had set his heart.

"All this was hard, and Aunt Maria pitied him from the bottom of her heart. All through the trying time she was his devoted nurse. She had come to stay only a few days, but she stayed weeks, till George was able to get about on crutches, and then she took him home with her to finish his recovery in the country.

"Not a word had been said by either of them about the cause of all this trouble, though the matter was no doubt often in their thoughts. But one evening, sitting on the piazza with his aunt, he suddenly broke out with, 'Aunt Maria, what did you throw in my face that night?'

"'Why, Georgie,' said his aunt, 'it was only my yeast; and I had no idea of hurting anybody, and, of course, I never dreamed that it was you.'

"'I suppose you thought it was a burglar,' said George with a faint laugh.

"'Of course I did,' said his aunt, 'and I didn't mean to hurt him, — I thought only of scaring him away, and in letting the yeast fly I forgot that the cork would fly too. I can't tell you how sorry I am.'

"'You need n't be sorry, Aunt Maria,' he said, — 'it served me just right for trying to frighten you. I think I've got enough of playing jokes. I find they always get me into trouble, and this one — ' He stopped.

"'This one,' said his Aunt Maria kindly, 'has been a very severe lesson, and I'm sorry I was the means of giving it to you. But perhaps you needed it, George.'

"'Oh, yes,' said George wearily, 'I needed it all right, — and it's a sure cure.'"

When the story ended, Harry slipped out and went home, determined not to hear any

more stories about boys' fun, since it always seemed to get them into trouble.

But he could n't help being interested in a mystery that the town was just then much excited over, and he felt sure boys had nothing to do with that.

CHAPTER XI

THE MYSTERY OF DEAN'S HOLLOW

THE trouble at Dean's Hollow began about a particularly fine pear-tree belonging to Mrs. Norton, who lived a little out of the village.

This fruit was a great temptation to the idle youth of the neighborhood, and, being in a lonely place, it was not hard for them to steal it.

This summer, as it began to ripen, Willis, Mrs. Norton's son, resolved to see if he could n't keep it for their own use. He kept a light burning in the house at night to show thieves that some one was up, and several times during the night he went out to see that all was safe.

One night, however, when the pears were about ready to gather, he was obliged to go ten miles away to attend to some business for his employer, and though Molly, his sister,

thought she could watch the garden as well as he, she must have fallen asleep, for she did not hear a movement near the tree, and yet the fruit was gone.

Willis Norton was a quick-witted boy. Being honest and straightforward, attending to the work of his place — which was under clerk in the country store — he was naturally no favorite with idle, loafing boys, whose only purpose was to pass though life with as little trouble and as much "fun" (as they called their mischief) as possible.

When Willis came home and heard of the loss of the pears, he put his wits to work to think who had known of his trip out of town, and he soon remembered that Lu Burns was in the store when Mr. Mills decided to send him, instead of the other clerk.

The next time he saw Lu, he said, significantly, —

"I think I have a clue to the pear thieves, and I shall keep watch of them till I catch them at something."

"Oh, you will!" sneered Lu. "I wish you

joy of your sneaking business! If they only knew *you* were on their track, they'd no doubt come and confess to your ma!"

"Never mind," said Willis. "See if I don't catch them in some mischief! I know their tricks."

"Smart boy!" said Lu, ironically. "Does the antiquated lady know you're out?" and he shut the door before Willis could open his mouth to reply.

"The mean sneak!" said he to himself, as he sauntered towards home. "I'll pay him off for watching us. I'll — let me see — I'll — oh, I know! I'll scare that prinked-up sister of his," — a revenge just suited to a boy of his character.

For several days he could not think of any plan, but pausing in an idle mood one day by an old superannuated grindstone, that had stood in the yard for years, exposed to rain and storm, he thoughtlessly seized the crank and gave it a turn. A doleful, wheezing creak rewarded his efforts, and at that instant the thought came to him.

He sat down on a log near by, and for the space of five minutes — a long time for him — was in deep study. When he rose, there was a smile on his face and a resolute look in his eyes, and he muttered to himself, —

"I'll do it! — if the boys 'll help."

For a few days after that chance turn of the grindstone handle, there was unusual quiet in the village. No fruit was stolen, no pigs turned into a neighbor 's field, no cows driven off into the woods. The Burns gang seemed to have suddenly grown industrious and quiet. Though Willis kept his sharp eyes very wide open, he scarcely saw any of them, nor did he hear of any new mischief.

At last, however, there came a sensation with a vengeance. One night Molly Norton, who had to go through a piece of woods to school, came flying into the house, wild-eyed and pale as death, without shawl or books. On being questioned, she declared that she had heard frightful groans and horrid shrieks in the woods, which so frightened her that she ran, and lost her books and shawl.

Mrs. Norton laughed at her, and tried to persuade her to go back and find her things. But Molly was too much disturbed to be laughed out of her fright, and when Willis came home, he heard the story.

Of course he poohed at her terrors, and said he would go and hunt up the things. So, taking a big stick, he started down the road.

Now Dean's Hollow was in a lonely strip of woods, not very wide, — perhaps a quarter of a mile, — but several miles long, and though a well-traveled road ran through it, it was rather dismal, especially at dusk, at which time Willis entered it.

He walked on very bravely, thinking how he would laugh at Molly, and whistling softly as he went, till he came to a little bridge which crossed a stream. Just as his foot touched the plank, he heard a long-drawn, quavering groan on the right. It had a peculiarly weird and unearthly wail, not like any sound he ever heard or imagined.

Willis felt himself turn white ; but he was brave, and determined to go on. He crossed

the bridge hastily and walked along the path, looking earnestly for the missing articles. In a moment more he again heard an unearthly groan, more horrible than before.

Willis's knees knocked together; but at that instant he caught a glimpse of the bright shawl, and hastily snatching it up, he turned towards home, forgetting in his haste the books that had also been lost.

I will not say positively that he ran — but when he reached the house he was a little out of breath, though when accused of it, he laughed, and said it was nothing, and that it was too dark to see the books.

This was only the beginning of trouble. Molly positively refused to go through the woods alone the next day, and waited till a neighbor drove through, and begged a ride with him. After school she went to the store and waited till it was time for Willis to go home.

They started boldly, both trying to be lively, and pretending they were not afraid, though it was getting dark. But when they approached

the little bridge, the same horrible sound broke the deep silence. Molly positively shrieked, and perhaps Willis would have shrieked too, if he had n't felt that he was the "big brother." Anyway, they hurried home very fast; and then Willis admitted that he *had* heard something the night before.

The story got out, and was the beginning of the great excitement of the "Mystery of Dean's Hollow," which stirred the whole surrounding country to its depths, and will doubtless be remembered by many yet living. Through the day all was quiet, and the most careful searching by half the village failed to discover anything unusual, or any place of concealment in the whole woods.

As the story spread, people came from the neighboring towns, and many times large parties set out and scoured the woods, till there was hardly a tree that had not been sounded for a hollow trunk, nor a rock that had not been searched for a hiding-place, nor a bank that had not been pierced with hay-forks, to discover a cause for these sounds; for the

sturdy common sense of the neighborhood was not superstitious enough to accept them as supernatural.

The woods, however, remained as usual until near evening; but as soon as it was too dark to see clearly, those terrible, unearthly sounds — long-drawn, quavering groans followed by wheezy shrieks — would begin again.

The crowd — for every night attracted a large assembly — would rush in a body towards the sound, to find out where it was, and the next moment it would come from a far-off quarter, worse and more terrifying than before. Children screamed, superstitious women went into convulsions, and men turned pale; but away they would rush towards the sound. Then it would begin anew in still another direction.

This went on for a fortnight. The story spread like wildfire. Every man within fifty miles, who was able to do so, came to hear for himself the mysterious sounds of Dean's Hollow. Of course, all this time the wildest stories were rife of unheard-of tragedies and

other things which the fertile imagination of men will invent on similar occasions.

Business was neglected; school was a mere farce; the men lounged about the store and talked about the noises, telling each other horrible stories; and all the women visited each other in their homes and did the same. Children clung to their mothers' apron-strings, and things were going generally to rack and ruin.

Things had come to this pass when one day Mr. Mills, quietly and without attracting notice, asked half a dozen of the most sensible and least frightened men to meet privately, after dark, in the back room of the store.

When they had assembled, Mr. Mills told them that Willis Norton had suggested to him a possible solution of the mystery, and he wanted to talk it over with them; for though Willis was but a boy, he was a bright one, and having suspicions from the first, he had been very sharp in watching. So Willis was called in to tell his story.

"You all know," he began, modestly, "that

this was heard first by my sister and me. I thought at the time that it was done by some enemy of mine; so I've been watching the ones I suspected, the Burns boys, and I've found out two or three things that make me 'most sure they're at the bottom of it."

"Well, what have you found out, boy?" asked Mr. Brooks, rather incredulously.

"I've noticed," said Willis, "that there is never but one of the Burns gang in the crowd at night. Sometimes one and sometimes another."

"That's nothing very surprising," said Mr. Brooks.

"I don't know about that," said Mr. Jones. "Those boys are 'most everywhere, I've observed."

"Whichever one is there," said Willis, turning gratefully towards Mr. Jones, "always tries to take the lead in drawing the crowd away from the noise. He always seems to have a reason. Then I've noticed they are not at all scared; and they're just the ones to run away from the noises if they didn't know any-

thing about them. I saw Tom Martin laugh one night when the people ran."

"I wonder we never thought of that gang," said Mr. Jones.

"I did think of them," said Mr. Mills, "but on looking around, I could always see one of them, but it never occurred to me that they were not all of them there. I should n't wonder if the youngster had the right clue, but where in the mischief can they hide?"

"I think they could easily hide in the upper part of the trees," said Willis. "I have looked at them in the daytime, and they are very thick."

"But no boys, however smart," said Mr. Brooks, who did n't seem to like the possibility of such a commonplace ending to the mystery, "could make such dreadful sounds. They 're not human!"

"So I thought, and so I told Willis," said Mr. Mills; "but you must hear his performance on an old horn before you decide what boys can't do; though, to be sure, a horn is n't what you 'd call human. Willis, bring it out."

Willis produced from a drawer a battered tin horn, and proceeded to draw from it some doleful sounds, which surprised the audience.

"I declare," exclaimed Mr. Jones, "that actually does sound like it, if you allow for distance, and dark woods, and a frightened crowd!"

"I believe we 've all been a pack of fools," said Mr. Wilson, "and duped by a gang of rascals; but if we can catch them it shall be their last prank in *this* town."

"That 's what Willis and I 've been talking about, and what I believe we can do," said Mr. Mills.

"Well, out with the plan," said Mr. Brooks.

"What do you think of this?" said Mr. Mills. "Willis found that the sounds came only from three places. We thought that if two of us should quietly take each of these directions, only separate from the crowd, without being noticed, we might slip up near enough to tell, the next time the sounds broke out, exactly what spot they came from."

"That 's it! That 's a good plan!" cried Mr.

Jones, violently slapping his knee; "and I propose we go at once. I want to bring this thing to the light, and see if a pack of scamps like that Burns gang *can* get up such a row."

A little more discussion followed. The men carefully made their plans, divided into parties of two, and quietly stole out of the store. Taking their way to the woods, they found the performance in full blast, the crowds surging hither and thither as the groans appeared to come from this way or that.

Following the plan agreed upon, when the crowd rushed in one direction, Mr. Mills and Mr. Jones stole softly nearer, and when the sounds came from afar off, and the crowd ran that way, these two quietly stood their ground, making no sound. In this way the three parties, in a short time, managed each to be near enough to tell definitely in which tree to look for the noises.

A sudden shout at the foot of one tree, after a louder groan than usual, sent terror to the heart of — *Lu Burns!*

The shout was, "We've got him!" and a calm, stern voice followed it up with, —

"Now, young man, if you don't come down out of this tree in just one minute, I shall fire into it!" emphasizing the remark by a knock on the trunk.

Lu saw that it was all over, but he did n't fancy facing a duped crowd, so he slunk into as small a place as possible, hoping they would n't shoot.

A minute went by, and then a shot whistled up through the tree. There was a rustle, and a scramble, and a sliding, and in a moment Lu Burns dropped from the lowest limb, and an old ram's horn tumbled after him.

The two men seized him by the arms, and hastened towards the other trees. Each party soon secured its prisoner, and the three hang-dog-looking boys were marched to the village and locked for the night in an extemporized jail.

After a night of anxiety, they were ready enough to tell the story they had sullenly refused to tell when caught, and Lu told it for all.

"I was mad at Will Norton," he began. "We only meant to scare his sister, but when we found how easy we could fool folks, we did it just for fun. We did n't mean any harm," he whined, seeing little sympathy with such fun on the faces of his listeners.

On being questioned, he told how the creaking old grindstone first suggested to him a way to frighten Molly Norton, who passed through the woods to school. With the help of the boys and some rope, he had succeeded in pulling it up into a tree, where a mass of old crows' nests and branches concealed it from sight. There it was securely tied. A ram's horn was hidden in another tree and an old fish-horn in another. Each night three of the boys repaired to their posts, while the fourth stayed in the crowd to avoid suspicion, and to lead people away from the trees.

And this was all, — the mean, low sport of four mischievous boys!

While the indignant people were deliberating what should be done with them, — since there was no law exactly touching their

case, — Mr. Burns, their father, asked leave to speak.

He said that he and his wife had long been tried with their boys, and the last night they had talked it over, and decided to put Louis on board a ship, where he would be made to obey; and as Will was younger and more easily led, they proposed to put him in a severe military school, in the hope of making a decent man of him some day.

The neighbors, who were sorry for Mr. and Mrs. Burns, readily gave the two boys up to him, and in a few days Lu sailed on a three years' voyage, and Will began his school life.

The other two of the gang, who were only followers of the Burns boys, were severely reprimanded, and on their promise to behave themselves, were set free. They did not soon forget the lesson of that day. The last I heard of them they were both respectable farmers. Will Burns ran away from school and enlisted as a common soldier, and Lu never returned to the village.

"More boys' fun getting them into trouble,"

said Harry Barnes to himself, as he walked home after that night's discovery of the Burns gang. "I wonder who 'll be found out next! Perhaps the queer thief we hear so much about. He would n't turn out to be a boy, I know!"

Strange to say, that mystery of the town was also solved a few days later by a sort of accident to Carl Marsh one day when he was out hunting.

CHAPTER XII

A BOY'S DEN IN THE WOODS

"WELL, I must say I don't half like this," said Carl Marsh to himself, stepping a little faster as he spoke, and looking anxiously at the ground on all sides. "It's too dark to see the trail," he went on, "and this part of the woods is perfectly strange to me. I—I—really believe I'm lost!"

"I would n't mind camping out," he continued, after a few moments' thought, "but I'm not over well fixed, nothing to eat, not even a blanket to sleep on, and—and"—feeling in his pockets—"not even a solitary match to light a fire. I'm cold now, and half starved besides;" and the boy of fifteen threw himself rather disconsolately on a bed of moss.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," he thought, "only small game in these woods, and very shy at that, as I know to my cost,"

looking at his empty game-bag. "I suppose one night's fasting won't kill me, but the folks 'll be sure I 've shot myself with my new gun, and I 'm afraid they 'll have half Hillside out to hunt me before morning."

"Then everybody 'll know I did n't kill anything," he added in a vexed tone. "I tell you what!" — as a new thought struck him — "I 'll hide the game-bag, and pretend it is lost, and let the boys guess how much game was in it."

No sooner said than done. He threw his precious new bag up into the thick branches of the tree above him, and then with his knife cut an H in the bark to guide him to it again.

"I suppose I might as well go to bed," was his next remark. "How funny to sleep with my clothes on! I always wanted to; but I think a blanket and a pillow would be comfortable."

Thinking what a fine adventure this would be to tell to the boys, and feeling very manly and experienced, he made himself as comfortable as he could on the mossy bed, and soon

fell asleep, not much disturbed by the thought of a night in the woods. It was different, however, when he waked, several hours later. His hard bed had given him ugly dreams, and some sudden, sharp sound roused him. He was in a moment wide awake and listening. It was pitch dark, and not a sound to be heard, except the wind in the trees, and now and then the snapping of a dry twig, as though some animal was moving about.

Carl now remembered, for the first time, stories that he had heard about these woods: that shooting was heard in them at night, and a man's figure sometimes seen gliding quickly past without a sound, and bearing a gun. Then, too, he thought of Hillside's one mystery, a mysterious thief, so unlike ordinary thieves that superstitious people did not hesitate to say it was no mortal. Neither money, jewels, or silver tempted this strange thief; and of the curious things he selected, he never took but one article from a house. Here a coat, there a loaf of cake; now a late newspaper, and again a fresh pie; to-night a pair of shoes, and next week a book;

from Jones's store full of goods a jackknife, and from Stevens's big grocery a can of kerosene oil. The town was small, and every suspicious person well known and closely watched, but years had passed since the mysterious thief had begun his visits, and not the smallest clue to his identity yet existed.

These unpleasant thoughts crowded into Carl's head, as he sat under the tree in that dark night. His eyes were peering intently before him, when he thought he saw something on the ground not ten feet away. As he fancied, there appeared suddenly a faint light, with the well-defined figure of a man in stooping position before it. It was gone in an instant, and was followed by a rustle as though of footsteps, but before Carl recovered from the cold horror into which he was thrown, all was still again.

There was no more sleep for him that night. It was so quiet in the woods that sometimes he fancied he must have dreamed of that strange instant's vision. During the long, long hours, he thought of all the ghost stories he had ever

read, and of the strange reports of the mysterious thief, and all other dismal things.

After a while he had nearly persuaded himself that that instant's vision of a light and a man was a dream, and had begun to grow drowsy again, when suddenly he was wide awake once more. Surely he heard steps! He looked sharply before him. There was the faintest beginning of daylight, and he was sure he saw an indistinct and bundled-up figure pass before him without sound, and melt away or disappear in the earth a few feet beyond.

This last sight so frightened him that he crept behind the tree, and hurried away as fast as he could. It was not long now before morning, and as soon as he could see, Carl began to look for the trail. He discovered it not twenty feet from where he had passed the night, and at once started for the village. He found all tranquil at home, the family having understood that he would stay all night with a friend, but the whole town was agitated by the news that the mysterious thing had paid

a visit to the house of Mrs. A, and carried off a blanket.

"Ah!" thought Carl instantly, "that figure looked like a man with a blanket over his shoulder."

He told no one, however, because there was so strong a belief in the woods' being haunted that he knew he should be laughed at, and more than that, he could n't bear to lose the reputation for bravery which his night's exploit had given him. After a week or more, however, he began to think of his new game-bag up in that tree, and to long to go after it. Yet — though he never would have owned it — he was really afraid to go alone, and to tell any of the boys would reveal the truth of its being hidden.

After much thought he resolved to tell Uncle Dick. His Uncle Dick was Carl's refuge in all trouble, for he had not forgotten when he was young himself, and was always sure to sympathize and help. So that evening he went up to Uncle Dick's room, and told him the whole story. He did not laugh at him, as

Carl half expected; on the contrary, he seemed unusually thoughtful.

"Why do you believe I really did see somebody?" asked Carl.

"I don't know, Carl," said his uncle; "maybe, and maybe not. There's certainly something strange about our thief, and queer things have been seen and heard in those woods. I've often had half a mind to explore them, and now you've got a sort of a clue to the spot to look, I don't know but I'll spend a day out there, before long. Hunting — of course," he added with a peculiar look, which Carl understood to mean that the object of the expedition was to be a secret.

"We must take our guns, boy," he went on, "for of course you'll go with me."

"Oh, yes!" Carl cried eagerly. "I believe I can show you the very spot."

"Well," said Uncle Dick thoughtfully, "let me see — suppose we go to-morrow."

Next morning the two hunters, declining numerous offers of company, shouldered their

guns and started for the woods. They followed the trail, which was a faint path, said to be an old Indian trail, till they came about to where Carl remembered finding it on that morning. A half-hour's search brought them at last to the tree with H cut in its bark, and while Carl climbed it to look for his game-bag, Uncle Dick examined the surroundings.

There was nothing peculiar to be seen. The ground was covered with dead leaves, and was a gradual slope to the top of a hill. He was about to give up the search, sure that there was nothing there, when he stumbled over something which proved to be a small pipe sticking two or three inches out of the ground. Even then he would not have noticed it, but chancing to be directly over it, he saw that it was no bit of old rubbish, but a small stove-pipe, extending into the ground, and empty as far as he could see. This roused him to closer search, and after placing Carl against the tree, and making him point out the very spot where the vision seemed to disappear, his labors were confined to a few feet. Striking the earth with his

ramrod, he at length touched a spot which sounded hollow.

Hastily brushing away the dead leaves, he brought to light a board about two feet square. It was so near the color of the leaves that it could scarcely be seen, and on closer examination proved to be covered with enameled cloth.

"Ah!" he exclaimed. "Now we've got him!" and he tried to lift the board. But the edge overlapped a flat rock, and he could not stir it.

"Locked up, eh?" said Uncle Dick. "I think it'll not be burglary to break that lock. It's well I have the power to arrest him."

"Who do you suppose it is?" asked Carl eagerly.

"Of course it's no one but our cunning thief," said Uncle Dick, putting the end of a stout stick that he had cut in position to pry open the strange door, Carl meanwhile standing one side, to be out of the way in case of a rush.

There was a strain, a slight cracking, some-

thing yielded, and in a moment the board rose from its place and disclosed the entrance to a hole which appeared to lead into the earth.

It was big enough for a man to crawl through, and Uncle Dick threw down his stick, took off his coat, and prepared to enter.

"Oh, don't go in!" cried Carl excitedly. "Shoot in! maybe it 's a bear!"

Uncle Dick turned and faced his nephew. "Bears don't usually make wooden doors, and hang them with hinges," he said. "Only a two-legged bear would take so much pains to hide his den. But when I get started down, I'll take my gun. It 's best to be prepared for anything."

When he had scrambled down a few feet, the passage turned to the level, and grew somewhat wider. Then Carl handed down the gun, and in a moment Uncle Dick disappeared. He was gone so long that Carl was beginning to get frightened, when at last his head appeared at the entrance, and he beckoned his nephew to come down.

Carl scrambled down, and in a moment or



CARL HANDED DOWN THE GUN

two stood in a small room, the queerest place that can be imagined. Except for the absence of windows, one would not think of being entirely underground. It was about eight feet square and six feet high, all nicely boarded up, sides and ceiling, and papered with illustrated newspapers. There was a small stove, with a pipe going up through the roof, — being, of course, the one that Uncle Dick had stumbled over. There was one chair, a small table, a shelf with a dozen books, a gun, a tiny cupboard with a few dishes, and a little food. On the table burned a lamp which showed all these things, and, in fact, it was an extremely cosy and comfortable home. On one side of the room, on a narrow lounge, wrapped in a blanket, lay the owner and builder — sound asleep.

He was not much more than a boy, perhaps twenty years old, bleached quite pale by his confinement from the light, but looking strong and muscular enough to warn the uninvited visitor to keep tight hold of his gun. While they stood there, the sleeper opened his

eyes, and in an instant sprang to his feet with, "What do you want here?"

"I want you, my man," said Uncle Dick, "to answer to the charge of theft; and if I don't mistake," he added, after a closer look, "you answer to the name of John Bradley."

"I don't know as my name's any business of yours, Dick Marsh," said he sullenly.

"Then you really are John!" said Uncle Dick with amazement. "And have you lived in this hole ever since you disappeared from Hillside — let me see — five years ago?"

"Supposing I have, what of it?" said Bradley defiantly.

"Oh, nothing, only it accounts for some of the strange stories floating around the village. But come; let's get out of here."

"Let me shut up before I go," said Bradley.

"Shut up!" laughed Uncle Dick; "much good that'll do. I don't suppose there's a boy in Hillside but'll be in this cave before to-morrow night. Wild horses could n't keep them out of such a curious place. Why, man! you don't expect to spend another five years

here, do you, when every baby in Hillside will hear about it in a few hours?"

Evidently that thought had not occurred to him. He gave a lingering look around his room, and Uncle Dick, who was watching him keenly, noticed that his glance rested on one particular spot. A thought struck him.

"By the way," he said carelessly, "I may as well search for your bank. Of course you've been able to save a penny in your peculiar way of getting your living," and he went at once towards the point he had noticed, tapping the wall as he passed. In a moment he struck a hollow spot, and prepared to break it in; but the prisoner spoke.

"Don't force it. I'll open it. It has every cent I have in the world, but it's money honestly earned."

"As how?" asked Uncle Dick sarcastically.

"Selling skins of animals that I caught at night," said Bradley.

"Who buys skins in Hillside?" asked Uncle Dick incredulously.

"No one that I know of, but some one does

at Waterford," and at this he threw open a small door in the wall, covered like the rest with a picture. It hid from sight a small niche in which lay a bag half filled with gold pieces. Uncle Dick took it out.

"This I shall count here in your presence," said he, "and seal up till you've had your trial, when the court will say what shall be done with it."

This took some time, but at length they got away; and taking Bradley's arm to prevent his running away, Uncle Dick marched his prisoner to the village.

Never was such a sensation created in that quiet town. Uncle Dick, of course, would not stop to explain, but Carl, who was bursting with the news, managed to whisper it to some of the boys, who spread it far and wide; and before the jail lock had fairly turned upon him, the whole town knew that the mysterious thief was caught, and had turned out to be John Bradley.

The story of this boy had almost been forgotten, but it was now revived, and told with

fresh interest. He was the son of a poor widow, and rather an odd boy always. He never seemed to care for playmates, but always wandered off alone, generally in the woods. He went to school till he was nearly fifteen years old, when his mother died, and he grew more odd and silent than ever. He lived alone in the cottage, and would go off and be gone days together, no one knew where.

Finally there was a robbery of a store in town, and suspicion fell upon him, though it was afterwards proved that he had nothing to do with it. This made him bitter against the villagers, and soon afterwards he disappeared. Nothing more was seen of him, and he was supposed to have run away to sea, and after a while he was forgotten.

At first, in jail, he was very sullen, and refused to say anything, but little by little Uncle Dick had by many kindnesses won from him his story. He had always known of the cave, and he had, after his mother's death, taken his only pleasure in fitting it up to live in. When suspicion was directed to him, he resolved to

live there altogether, away from the world, which he fancied was all against him. Hunting was his only enjoyment, and by hunting he resolved to live, sleeping daytimes, when people were out, and hunting by night, when animals were out.

But another passion grew within him, for money; and at last he fell into the way of stealing what he needed for his living, and saving the money he received for skins. But for that unfortunate greed for gold, he might have been an innocent though eccentric hermit all his life; now, he was a thief in the hands of the law.

But the last act of this strange story drew near. One morning, before the trial, the jail was found open and the prisoner gone. A note to Uncle Dick was found in his abandoned cell, in which he said that he should never be seen in Hillside again, and asking that his money be used to pay for the things he had stolen, and he would begin the world anew.

He was pursued, but never found, and his

money was used as he wished. Years afterwards, when Carl had almost forgotten his night in the woods and its strange consequences, Uncle Dick received a letter from John Bradley, in Australia, saying that he had worked his way as a sailor to that land, and after all these years had become a farmer for himself, and was living a respectable life.

The strange little underground house was of course visited, as soon as its whereabouts were known, by every boy in the village, as Uncle Dick had predicted, though not until its furniture had been removed was its position made public. For a while it was an object of great interest, and boys with lanterns and torches searched it, looked at the pictures on the walls, and in fact wore the entrance into almost a highway. But as time went by it was forgotten, its walls caved in, animals took possession of it, and at last accounts, the place where it had been could hardly be found.

A good many days had now passed since Harry's runaway, and newer subjects had come

up to interest people. Stories of runaways became scarce, and Harry hoped he had heard the last about the pranks of mischievous boys. In fact, he was so relieved that he had a good laugh over something that happened to his friend Joe.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DOG'S REVENGE

Joe had been bragging. That 's the way the trouble began, and that 's the way a good deal of trouble begins, among big people as well as among little ones.

Ned Willis had a dog — a little fellow — named Spot; and he had been displaying his tricks to Joe that day. In an unlucky moment Joe began to brag about his brother's dog, Max.

Ned did n't believe that a big dog could be so funny as a little one. Then Joe waxed warm, and told stories bigger than ever. But Ned laughed at his pretensions, and taunted Joe to such a pitch that he told him he would go over to his brother's and get Max, if he would wait; and they would see what he would do. Ned said he would wait; so he threw himself on the grass and played with

Spot, while Joe went after Max. In a few minutes he returned, followed by a large black Newfoundland dog.

Now what ailed Max that day I can't imagine. Whether it was too warm, or he thought it undignified before a small dog, though he often went through all his tricks for Joe — played dead dog, shook hands, held a piece of meat on his nose, etc. — not a thing would he do that day. He just stood there and wagged his tail and looked at Joe. All the commands, shouts, and coaxings had no more effect on him than on the grass he stood on.

Ned began to laugh derisively, and say, "I told you so," and otherwise exasperate Joe, till his angry passions rose to a fearful height.

He seized a stick which he had tried to make Max jump over, and, holding the dog's collar in one hand, he gave him several hard blows. Max finally jerked away and ran yelping home, and Joe sat down on the grass to cool, feeling very hot and angry.

Joe thought that was the end of it; but not so Max. In his doggish soul his wrongs

rankled, and an opportunity soon came for him to punish his enemy.

Later in the day Joe went up to his brother's house for milk. The family happened to be all away, but that made no difference; for they always left the pail standing on the kitchen table, all ready, and Max was too good a watch-dog to allow any stranger to come in.

As usual, Joe walked into the house, took up the pail, and turned to go. But a growl arrested him. He looked around. There stood Max, his white teeth uncovered, his tail hanging down, his whole attitude meaning business.

"Poor dog," said Joe, and stooped to pat him, though rather nervously; for he well knew Max could be very fierce.

At this movement the dog gave a fiercer growl, and Joe hastily drew back.

"Poor doggy! poor Max! good fellow!" said Joe, in his most seductive tone. But Max growled, his eyes looked red and wicked, and Joe knew that if he moved he would fly at him.

"Well, I may as well wait till some of them

come in," said Joe to himself, and turned to sit down. Max flew at his foot, and held his head there with an ominous growl. Joe dared not move.

"I'll put this pail down, anyway," was his next thought. But Max resented the movement of his hand, as well as of his foot, and in unmistakable tones made Joe at last understand that he must stand on that spot and hold the pail till the family came.

Here was a fix: Mary waiting at home for the milk to put in her custards, Ned Willis waiting in the back yard for him to go in swimming, and both of them knowing that he had only run up for the milk.

How Ned would tease him! How Mary would laugh at him!

Involuntarily he made a movement to go. Max was ready for him, and this time seized his foot.

Joe tried to coax him, and he let go; but stood ready for another move.

"Where under the sun are all the family?" was his next thought. Then he remembered

that his brother was at the office, and would not come home till six o'clock, his brother's wife had gone to town with his sister shopping, and the girl had gone home for a week. He looked at the clock. It was four o'clock — two hours before he could hope for release. He heard Ned call him. The calls came nearer. He was coming after him! He would catch him in this plight! How Joe's face flushed, as he thought of that! If he could only lock the door and put down the curtain. But Max was alert; he dared not move. The calls came nearer, and at last Ned's mocking face looked in at the open window.

"Why don't you come along?" was his question.

"I can't. I don't want to," he stammered. Max growled, and Ned saw how it was.

"Oh, ho! the dog won't let you. He remembers old scores, eh! Say, Joe, why don't you sit down, if you will stay? Are n't you tired, holding that pail?"

So he went on, as boys sometimes will, teasing and provoking, till Joe fairly raged.

"Ned Willis," he said savagely, "if you don't shut up, I'll pitch this pail of milk at you, if Max eats me up!"

Ned saw it was time to stop, so he turned away, calling, as he went, —

"I heard Mary anxiously inquiring for you. I'll stop and let her know you've got a pressing engagement."

Well, he did, of course, and as he went through the village he told every boy he met; and one by one they crept up and peeped through the window at the unfortunate prisoner, each one saying his witty or smart thing at Joe's expense.

Poor Joe! It was rather hard. He had threatened to fight every boy in town, and every muscle ached like the toothache before his brother's wife came in and found him.

With difficulty she got the dog off, and Joe had to confess to the beating.

He dragged his weary bones home, found Mary in a towering passion, no custards for tea, and a lecture from his father on cruelty to animals.

The boys did n't forget it either, and made life a burden to him for weeks. As to Max, he did not offer to touch him again; but he never forgave him, and met all his advances with a growl.

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